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**Porcupine Kisses: Jewish women in Israeli Jewish & Arab  
couples**

Limore Racin

Thesis submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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**Signed declaration**

I, Limore Racin, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## **Abstract**

### **Porcupine Kisses: women in Israeli Jewish & Arab couples**

There is little data concerning psychological aspects of Israeli Jewish & Arab couples. This study investigates Israeli Jewish & Arab minority couples from the perspective of the women involved in these relationships. It deploys qualitative and quantitative methods and findings are examined in relationship to the socio-political background in Israel.

The qualitative investigation revealed a number of themes that emerged, such as the women's disturbed child backgrounds, varied motives for entering these relationships, antagonism from family, coping styles employed, and their enduring relationships. The findings are also examined in relation to existing literature on mixed couples.

The quantitative study revealed significant differences between the study's sample and the general Israeli population including relationship quality and mental health status, which were evaluated via the Israeli Marital Quality Scale and the Brief Symptom Inventory. This study's findings indicate that women in Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships suffer significantly more symptoms than Israeli women in the general Israeli population in all dimensions, with the exception of obsessive-compulsive and interpersonal sensitivity. The findings also suggest that women in this study's sample group are happier with their spouses' characteristics, report better emotional communication, and, in general, score higher in perceived relationship quality than their counterparts, women in Israeli Jewish-Jewish and Arab-Arab couples.

Both qualitative and quantitative data provide useful perspectives for working with and counselling other similar Israeli Jewish & Arab couples. Recommendations for future research are also given. It should be noted that, when used, Israeli Jewish & Arab relationship/couples refers to a stable relationship formed of heterosexual partners: one, the female, being an Israeli Jew, and the male an Israeli Arab.

**Key terms:** Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships, cross-frontier relationships, marital/relationship quality, mental health, enduring relationships.

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# 1 Introduction

In this study, paired individuals from different cultural, racial, national, religious or ethnic backgrounds will be referred to as 'cross-frontier relationships' in an attempt to depict them neutrally (Clulow, 1993); terms such as 'mixed,' 'cross-cultural' or 'out' marriages have pejorative connotations, and suggest discrimination<sup>1</sup>. Defining what a cross-frontier relationship consists of is a difficult task, and definitions vary, depending on the nature and degree of differences that exist in partnerships. On the one hand, national and cultural differences will be exaggerated in order to identify and attack a foreign object when it is believed to be a threat to an endogenous group (resulting in racism), while on the other hand, anxiety about discriminating against those from different backgrounds will mask the frontiers and deny any differences. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that an emotional component is coupled with the term's definition and how it is used. Intercultural contact has historically resulted in a multitude of outcomes. It has led to war and genocide, through to more beneficial consequences, such as acts of charity and even love. This thesis will look at Israeli Jewish women who have crossed national, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds to find their Arab partners.

In general, societies tend to be endogamous, with members marrying within their group (Freeman, 1955; Giladi-McKelvie, 1986; McGoldrick & Preto, 1984; Porterfield, 1982). Many societies around the world see endogamous relationships – marriage within one's own group – as standard and exogamy, or marriage outside the group, as the exception. Very few societies practice exogamy regularly and these societies regard intra-cultural marriage a deviation from what is typically done. Examples of traditional societies that consider intermarriage the standard include the Banoni on the Solomon Islands (Lincoln, 1979) and the Tucanoan in the Vaupés region in the North West Amazon Basin of Brazil and Colombia (Jackson, 1983). The Tucanoan have a strong taboo against endogamy, and group membership is based on the basis of one's 'native' language. Residence is patri-local and language usage is dual-lingual (i.e. each partner speaks their 'native' language and receives the partner's

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<sup>1</sup> The author will use the term cross-frontier when discussing her views and Israeli Jewish & Arab relationship couples. In other instances, different terms will be used according to the terminology cited from the original literature.

'native' language back). A child grows up generally hearing the father's language spoken but also hears the language of the mother and those of other female relatives, all of who would be in-married. Thus, children grow up multilingual but their father's language is considered as their 'native' language. However, ideologies that consider exogamy the norm are the exception globally.

Human beings exhibit territoriality, make boundaries and defend those boundaries from intruders. Outsiders are considered a threat, as competitors for the in-groups' resources (notably opportunities for procreation) and jeopardize the in-groups' sense of security. Consequently, various cultural means have often been imposed in order to control and prevent cross-frontier marriages such as imposing "traditional norms, matchmakers, language newspapers, bride advertisements," (Jeter, 1982, p. 110). In short, out-group members are regarded as unwelcome intruders, with in-groups seeking to drive them away.

Rajecki (1985) has put forward the idea that xenophobia is a genetically-determined phenomenon, a biologically-adaptive response that explains human patterns of intra-group cooperation and inter-group competition. The most consistent and compelling evidence supporting this notion derives from empirical research on primates. When out-group members were introduced into natural in-groups of rhesus monkeys, with the exception of some infants, the rest of the introduced animals were met with intense aggression including threats, chases and direct physical attacks (Rajecki, 1985). Overall, aggression in the groups increased over baseline from 42% to 82% when strangers were in the vicinity. Of the 18 strangers released in the study (excluding infants) 100% were either killed or driven completely away (Rajecki, 1985, p. 20). As clearly observed, the entrance of foreign members threatened the in-group's sense of security. This response towards 'out-groups' from the same species also follows the view that out-group bias, overt prejudice and miscegenation taboos are unavoidable features of the human condition (Gaines & Reed, 1994, 1995). Relationships in social structure within in-group members tend to promote social stability, while interactions with out-group members often bring about social change. Coupled with this, social change often represents an implicit or explicit threat to the individual's sense of security, which can result in feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. Exogamy provokes change in

social structure – which can be experienced as frightening (xenophobia<sup>2</sup>) or exhilarating and attractive – but represents a challenge for all those affected.

The entire history of the human race, from the rise of man in the Stone Age, has been marked by the crossings of cultural advances from one group to another and from one civilization to another. For example, paper and printing are vital parts of Western civilization today, but they developed in China centuries before they made their way to Europe. The magnetic compass, which made possible the great ages of exploration, to a large extent, put the Western Hemisphere in touch with the rest of mankind. The conquest of Spain by Moslems in the eighth century A.D. made Spain a centre for the diffusion into Western Europe of the more advanced knowledge of the Mediterranean world and of the Orient in astronomy, medicine, optics, and geometry. The later rise of Western Europe to world pre-eminence in science and technology built upon these foundations. Subsequently, the science and technology of European civilization spread around the world, not only to European offshoot societies, such as the United States or Australia, but also to non-European cultures, of which Japan is perhaps the most striking example. Hence, it is this very cultural hybridity which has shaped some of the greatest flowerings of culture in human history. Eastern countries may also have benefited from contact with the Western World in areas relating to democratisation and human rights protection, although the extent to which this is applied is debatable.

The crossing of cultures can also result in positive biological outcomes, as in the case of deleterious genes inherited from one parent being masked by beneficial genes from the other parent. The almost total loss of sweat glands in some Arctic peoples is an example of an advantageous hybrid; certainly someone who produced enough perspiration to make his clothing wet in severely cold weather would be at a definite disadvantage. Every marriage crosses frontiers – notably of gender and of family culture – however similar partners may be. In this sense, each relationship partner comes from a different family/world background which can be referred to as cross-cultural.

However, differences in nationality, ethnicity and religion highlight collective frontiers, distinguishing between groups as opposed to individuals. When individuals

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<sup>2</sup> Xenophobia is an irrational fear of strangers.



marry across the collective frontiers of nationality, ethnicity and religion, they raise issues for the group. Accordingly, marriage is both a social institution as well as a personal relationship. In any case, however, a cross-frontier relationship is defined, and, regardless of collective and individual levels, there is a need to differentiate 'me' from 'not me,' 'us' from 'them,' because identity is defined by the drawing up of such distinctions. The tendency to differentiate is depicted by both groups and individuals alike and similar dynamic processes operate to protect identities (Reardon, 1993).

The external criticism and charged emotions that arise as a result of cross-frontier marriage have not dampened the increase in the number of people who chose to marry individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Durodoye, 1994). The 'Era of Globalisation' is fast becoming the preferred term for describing the current times; the world is constantly seeming smaller, with population growth increasingly placing people from different groups in closer proximity to each other. Economic development results in a relationship of dependence and interdependence between nations, and travelling between countries is easier and quicker today than ever before. Whether as an effect of war, employment, famine, unemployment, educational opportunities, affluence or leisure, people encounter opportunities to travel, and, by doing so, they meet people from different backgrounds with whom they may live or even marry. The fascination with 'foreignness,' the possible security and comfort offered to an indigent stranger, or practical benefits of 'marrying into' another country may result in cross-frontier marriages. To the extent that the boundaries of nationality, ethnicity and religion become more permeable in response to this moving tide of humankind, these marriages can be expected to increase. Researchers (e.g. Breger & Hill, 1998) have been investigating this phenomenon closely, focusing on the issues and challenges associated with this form of marriage. Nevertheless, linguistic, geographic, religious, and racial in-group/out-group prejudices continue to divide people around the world. Hollingshead (1950) attempted to identify the barriers that existed to cross-frontier marriages. He found three barriers, namely ethnicity, religion and race, where race is biological and ethnicity is culturally determined. Significantly, his research demonstrated that these barriers were not all alike. He showed that people tended to marry most frequently across ethnic lines, followed by religious lines, with racial lines being the least frequently crossed. An interesting point to note here is that the participants in the

present study crossed both ethnic and religious lines when entering the relationships with their partners.

A review of the literature reveals two theories that seem to dominate the cross-frontier discussion. The first is that, relative to homogeneous marriages, cross-frontier marriages are the more susceptible to stress within their relationships because of outsiders' reactions (Chan & Smith, 1995; Ibrahim & Schroeder, 1990; Solsberry, 1994); the second asserts they are at higher risk of ending in divorce (Monahan, 1970; Rankin & Maneker, 1987; Schwertfeger, 1982). In general, cross-frontier relationships, specifically mixed-ethnic ones, are thought to be less stable than homogeneous mono-ethnic marriages, because of familial and societal disapproval of such unions and of the different values and customs these couples bring into their marriage. A CDC (Center for Disease Control and Prevention) study showed that 41% of mixed-ethnic relationships break up compared with 31% of same-ethnic. In other words, mixed-ethnicity accounts for a 33% increased risk of break up (Niolin, 2003). Despite these findings, this is not always the case, as divorce rates for cross-frontier couples are not significantly different from mono-cultural divorce rates (Aldridge, 1978; Durodoye, 1994; Ho, 1990). Even if the premise is accepted that cross-frontier couples are at a high risk for divorce, the primary reason could be linked to the fact that spouses in these relationships are more likely to be in second or subsequent marriages (Aldridge, 1978; Durodoye, 1994), a factor itself associated with greater likelihood of divorce (Cherlin, 1989). The paradoxical combination of results necessitates further studies by social scientists on such couples.

Sociological viewpoints regarding cross-frontier relationships vary. Most liberal writers contend that, ideally, society would be best served by the disappearance of racial and religious prejudice, thus paving the way for unlimited cross-frontier marriages (Cahnman, 1963). The opposing view, supported by (although sometimes flawed) divorce and crime statistics, holds that cross-frontier marriages are sufficiently precarious to be considered undesirable. Some consider cross-frontier marriage, in particular interfaith ones, as pathology (Hoge & Ferry, 1981). Early studies, (e.g. Little, 1942), say these couples are less mentally healthy, that these marriages often tend to be between people who are not strongly tied to their own cultures, who are less traditional or more adventurous and who are willing (or anxious) to venture further from the security and predictability of the familiar to marry across cultures. For others, culture is

of no importance. However, it can also be asserted that many cross-frontier relationships involve individuals who, in general, feel comfortable outside their own culture, perhaps because they were raised in several countries, were themselves products of a dual-culture marriage, or have at least some experience of cross-cultural relationships at home or abroad. For these people, marrying someone from another culture is perhaps more natural than marrying someone in close proximity. Nevertheless, there are many for whom this is not the case and others who have no international background but still find themselves first attracted, then attached to, someone from another part of the world.

Is it purely attraction and/or love that motivate individuals to enter a relationship with someone from another culture? It may be a combination of love and chance, or something driving an individual to a 'foreign' direction, such as an individual's desire to leave for various social, cultural, or personal reasons (Romano, 2001). These motivations often reflect social pressure associated with family norms, stress and frustration experienced from society, at the workplace, or even boredom with their lifestyles. Was there something unique about a person from that culture which appealed more than potential partners from their own? Differences in background do not necessarily imply dissimilar values, goals, interests, priorities or world view.

Most literature on cross-frontier marriages is restricted in one of two ways. Either it is limited to statistical data describing national or regional cross-frontier marital patterns, or it focuses solely on various legal or social aspects of these marriages. Moreover, the literature is dominated by studies gathered from black-white interracial couples, and Jewish and Gentile couples in the United States. Few academics have investigated Israeli Jewish & Arab cross-frontier marriages in Israel (the author is aware of only two unpublished dissertations and scant sociological journal articles: e.g. Abady, 1991; Abu-Rayya, 2000; Cohen, 1969). This study aims to fill this particular void. An examination of women's motivations for entering these cross-frontier relationships was assessed, in an attempt to enhance the understanding of their relationships and to enable an understanding of, and a window into, their relationship quality (resilience or vulnerability).

Due to the religious Islamic strictures that prohibit Arab Muslim women from 'marrying out' of their religion, but permit Arab men to marry a woman from another faith, this study focuses specifically on a group of Jewish women involved in Israeli

Jewish & Arab couples<sup>3</sup>. The researcher interviewed women and not men for this study because it was women rather than men who showed more interest and agreed to be interviewed. Furthermore, the women also shouldered the burden of responsibility for the 'smoothness' of my visit particularly when their partner refused to participate. There is evidence to support the tendency for women to volunteer more frequently than men in studies seeking personal information; personal disclosure in research studies is still much more indicative with female than with male socialization (Root, 2001). To expand on this, and considering the specific situation of the male partner being an Israeli Arab, several informants pointed out potential cross-cultural obstacles which the researcher would most likely encounter, and, for which only some correction could be made:

- In general, and to an extent that goes beyond the affected males, Arab men are more reserved and do not tend to talk about feelings of sadness, weakness or vulnerability, at least in part due to their profound sense of not being able to lose face in their society. As a consequence, the amount they feel able to reveal about their personal and inner worlds may be more limited.
- If Arab men talk about their emotions it is not normally with strangers. They are more reserved individuals, who are reluctant when it comes to sharing aspects of their personal lives.
- Assuming that the researcher, as an Israeli Jewish female will be identified as such, issues of credibility and trust may also need to be considered, and the researcher may be perceived as siding with the female, Jewish partner, creating potential perceived bias against the dialogue of the Arab male. Indeed, there is evidence for such researcher-related bias where, irrespective of the political issues, 'western' researchers have objectified Arab subjects through research and have not provided any supportive counselling.

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<sup>3</sup> No Israeli Arab Christian women in relationships with Israeli Jewish men were included in the present study due to the infrequency of, and consequently difficulty in finding, such couples. One Israeli Arab Christian woman involved with an Israeli Jewish man was found and consequently interviewed. However, she was excluded from the present study as it was speculated that it would add another layer of complexity to the study.

This study employed in-depth personal interviews with 29 women in Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships to shed light on their individual experiences. This produced oral history narratives that served as the bulk of the primary source material and enabled the researcher to discern what these relationships can generate within their particular social milieus and for the Israeli society as a whole. Following the in-depth interviews, questionnaires (demographic questionnaire, Israeli Marital Quality Scale and the Brief Symptom Inventory) were administered and completed by the women. The Israeli Marital Quality scores were then compared to the scores of women involved in Israeli Jewish-Jewish and Arab-Arab couples and the women's Brief Symptom Inventory scores were then compared with Israeli norms<sup>4</sup>.

The introductory section of this study examines cross-frontier marriages generally and is divided into six parts. The first outlines personal tendencies of those who are involved in cross-frontier relationships. An overview of research concerning the cross-frontier members' motivations for entering such relationships, in particular, 'insiders' and 'outsiders' perspectives is also discussed. The second section illustrates viewpoints relating to psychopathology and individuals involved in cross-frontier relationships. The third part is devoted to the exploration of positive aspects of cross-frontier relationships. The fourth section explores notions of ethnicity and ethnic identity with those involved in cross-frontier relationships. The fifth part reviews the Arab-Israeli conflict. Finally, in the last section, a conclusion about cross-frontier relationships is described and the project's objectives are outlined in detail.

### **1.1 Personal tendencies and motivations from the existing literature**

Many researchers have studied the factors that contribute to the formation of cross-frontier marriages (Porterfield, 1978, Gordon, 1964, Merton, 1941). Although there is no model for intercultural spouses, the personal tendencies of those individuals

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<sup>4</sup> The control group data for the Israeli Marital Quality scores were taken from the study performed by Lavee and Ben-Ari (2004) and the Israeli norms for the brief symptom Inventory were provided by the study performed by Gilbar and Ben-Zur (2002).

attracted to cross-frontier marriages are typically categorized into the following categories (Romano, 2001):

- **Non-trationals:** these are individuals who are a part of, and accepted by, their own society, but do not belong to the in-group. They normally are not compelled to follow social norms, choosing to be loners. They feel so removed from their own culture or peer group that they decide on the course of their lives independently. Others may be happier outside their own society because they feel freed from pressures to join and to conform to values they do not fully share or want to identify with. This is illustrated in an excerpt from Romano's (2001) *Intercultural Marriage: Promises and Pitfalls*, where one non-militant Israeli did not want to live his life dominated by the political problems of his homeland. He reported feeling relaxed and more in-tune with his Brazilian bride than with anyone from his Kibbutz. His Brazilian partner was neither familiar with, nor worried about, what was going on in the Middle East. Consequently, being with her provided him with a space where he felt free from the world with which he did not wish to identify. He felt happier outside his own society, because he was freed from pressure to join and to conform to values he did not fully share.
- **Romantics:** some romantics cross all boundaries - class, race, religion, and age - when they enter cross-frontier marriages, because each additional difference provides and enhances the challenge, adventure and excitement of their international romance. Some may marry an illusion, and some may marry as a continuation of their wanderlust; for them, marrying someone from their same culture is predictable and boring (Romano, 2001). Gaines et al. (1999) studied interracial and interethnic partners where one partner was white and the other of colour. Their results indicated that the women and men in these couples expressed a high level of affection and respect towards each other. In other words, they admitted to being bonded both physically (sexual attraction and psychological arousal) and emotionally (emotional connection to each other that leads to trust, connection, and, warmth), suggesting a 'romantic' relationship model. This relationship model explained behavioural variance across other couple pairs such as Anglos (white Americans) paired with African Americans and Anglos paired with persons of colour other than

African Americans (Hispanics, Asian Americans or Native Americans) equally well. Romanticism played an important role for these couple members.

- **Compensators:** these are individuals who tend to marry to recapture their roots, to make up for something they always felt was missing. For example, this can include individuals who desire an identity that can be provided from a romantic partner of another culture. Sometimes they are looking for an alter ego, someone to 'complete' their personalities and believe only a foreigner can fulfil their desires (what they need or want). Some spouses have a family background where there was not a truly loving, intimate relationship among its members. Sometimes they are from families where one or both of their parents were absent (either physically or emotionally), and so they are more attracted to the other's cultural definition of 'family' and to the individual qualities of their spouse (Romano, 2001).
- **Rebels:** disappointed with their own country, with its politics, social changes, or way of life, these individuals are consciously or unconsciously marrying cross-culturally, almost as a form of protest against something in their own cultures that they dislike and/or want to get away from or things they cannot verbalise. This may include basic values or beliefs, sometimes minor or vague subtle dissatisfactions. These matrimonial rebels have made lifelong commitment to their statements of protest, their challenge to the status quo.

*Now a lot of people are proud of the fact that they are in mixed marriages. I mean, we were actually very proud. We were determined to make it work; and it was our concern and nobody else's. But you have to actually fight against the fact- is that what you are actually proud of, that you are just a mixed marriage, you know? Is their love there? Or is it just the fact that you are going against the convention? (Stringer, 1994, p. 84).*

- It can be speculated that some individuals enter these relationships simply as a means to go against the norm, itself an act exemplifying rebellion.

Furthermore, during different times of history, at times of war, cross-frontier marriages can be seen as an act of treason, as in the case of Anglo-German, Franco-Algerian, Israeli-Egyptian and Serbo-Croat marriages in recent history (Clulow, 1993).

- Internationals: An increase in the numbers of intercultural spouses takes place with those who have lived outside their passport countries for much of their lives. This may have occurred because their parents' careers were ones which resulted in them living in several countries. These individuals are referred to as 'third culture kids' or 'global nomads,' (Romano, 2001). These young people report not always having a sense of complete belonging to any one culture; during their formative years they were influenced strongly by another culture. They are cultural outsiders or observers of life and are sometimes referred to as belonging to a 'Nomadic culture,' (Romano, 2001).
- Others: While many normal healthy people are involved, and have convincing reasons for being, in intercultural marriages there are of course others whose reasons are more calculated, selfish, frequently neurotic or even pathological. Most literature regarding cross-frontier marriages to date has focused on these more or less dysfunctional types. On occasion, some marginal people, those who do not fit into their own society (who either feel, or actually are, ostracised by it), choose to marry someone from another culture whose cultural norms are more compatible with their own personal norms. These individuals may do so in an unconscious attempt to find a place where they belong or which they can dominate. Being in an intercultural relationship provides them with an escape from their social trap and into acceptance from another society. In other cases some individuals may marry into a different culture because they regard themselves as physically unattractive, or are for some reason unpopular with the opposite sex in their own society, and suddenly exult in success with foreign men or women (e.g. Taiwanese men marrying Thai women). Some, who belong to a minority race or ethnic group that sets them apart from the majority, hope to break away from the prejudice that dominates their lives by marrying someone from a culture where these particular prejudices are not present. Others marry to enhance the quality of their lives or to flee life in their own countries (socio-



political reasons), as was the situation when many GIs moved back to the USA with their war brides. Some are social climbers who marry to improve their social or economic position or to escape into what they consider will be a financially better world. Some marry to gain citizenship in another country and/or to avoid being deported, while other intercultural marriages are simple business arrangements and usually last as long as objectives of both partners are being met (Romano, 2001).

Romano (2001) maintained that there is no one way to define intercultural relationship members, as each couple is unique. So, the question is whether social scientists and psychologists alike have developed and put forth a stand against cross-frontier relationships so that they are typically regarded as being dysfunctional. Imamura (1986) posited a set of alternative terms; the sex ratio and propinquity views<sup>5</sup> as advanced by Cretser and Leon (1982) were only adequate when explaining specific circumstances and did not account for majority group members' marrying people from minority groups. Hypergamy, or the upward social mobility of the female, does not explain why an upper-class female from developed country would marry a lower-class male from developing country. Consequently, in her review, Imamura (1986) noted a lack of studies reporting information substantiating some cross-frontier couple members' personal tendency propositions (Cretser & Leon, 1982; Porterfield, 1982) and that more studies should be carried out to support the generalisations posited. Hence, there is no straightforward personality tendency which describes those involved in cross-frontier relationships. Likewise, individual motivations for choosing to marry someone outside race, religion or culture are diverse and the literature suggests motivation ranging from idealism to masochism (Porterfield, 1982; Scanzoni & Scanzoni, 1981). Several theories pertain to social and economic factors which may encourage intermarriage. Essentially, different notions have been put forward, ranging

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<sup>5</sup> Propinquity refers to the physical or psychological proximity between people. When the spatial distributions of two or more ethnic groups overlap to such an extent that there is a significant amount of mixing, then the probability of contact is maximised. Consequently, intermarriage may be an inevitable outcome if there is a substantial amount of social contact between the groups. Likewise, if two or more groups are highly segregated from one another, then there would be less chance that contacts would be made such that the amount of intermarriages would also be low (Peach, 1980).

from sociological (Gordon, 1964; Merton, 1941), geographical (Peach, 1980), and psychological (e.g. Porterfield, 1982; Lehrman, 1967) in nature (Cerroni-Long, 1985; Crester & Leon, 1982; Imamura, 1986). While some theories have received support, others have been challenged. Some sociological and demographic motivational theories will now be discussed.

Cross-frontier relationship patterns are shaped by demography. For example, where there are ample Jews there is a lower percentage of intermarriage compared to when there are only a few Jews in a given location. This idea is supported by Romanzo Adams (1937), as he suggests that the larger the group is, the higher the percentage of in-marriage is, irrespective of the sentiments. Milton Barron considers it as “a sociological truism that the percentage of intermarriage increases as the proportion of the group in the community decreases” (Adams, 1937, p. 191). Others argue that an unbalanced sex ratio results in cross-frontier marriages by those surplus members of a minority group who cannot find partners among their own people (Barron, 1972). This theory attempts to predict the gender of the person who is marrying out, depending on whether they belong to the majority or the minority group. This theory says that men perceived to be of lower social caste locally – for instance, Jews, Blacks, and Filipinos – get married to women of higher caste, such as Gentile Whites. Essentially, certain upwardly mobile lower-caste men - those who are considered handsome, talented, rich, or well-educated – exchange those qualities by marrying higher status women who have status but lack beauty, talent, wealth, or intellect (Merton, 1941; Davis, 1941). Following from this is the relation of class and cross-frontier marriage where it has been posited that individuals likely to intermarry are those who are college-educated, intellectual- and artistically-gifted people who regard their ethnicity lightly and mix with others of similar inclination (Gordon, 1964).

Hence, there is no unified motivational theory explaining motivations for people to enter cross-frontier relationships. The theories mentioned above do, however, present an analytical method for thinking about the occurrences of these relationships. They maintain that a number of structural factors, such as class, generation, and ethnic concentration in the surrounding population, shape cross-frontier patterns. However, it should also be noted that those patterns are also shaped by cultural factors, such as the images that one group has of another and of itself.

### 1.1.1 *Psychological motivations from 'insider's' and 'outsider's' perspectives*

The desire to enter and maintain a particular relationship can be seen as one especially satisfying, useful, and human means to self-expansion. A central human motivation is self-expansion, one that people search for in close relationships. There are four areas of expansion that interest humans to varying degrees (cited in Gaines & Ickes, 1997):

- The effect of physical and social (territoriality, power relationships, possessions, etc.).
- Cognitive complexity (differentiation, discovery of linkages, general knowledge, insight and wisdom).
- Social and bodily identity (identifying with other individuals, groups, for instance, family or nation, and nonhumans ranging from animals to gods).
- Consciousness of one's place in the universe (this is a unique human interest in metaphysics, meaning of life, ritual, religion, mythology, etc.).

Some speculate that those individuals involved in cross-frontier relationships feel that cultural differences are a means for self-expansion. In other words, for them, cultural disparity represents an opportunity for exploring value orientations other than one's own. Following this line of thought, people with high sensation-seeking motives are more likely to value such novelty, as findings indicate that they partake in such relationships significantly above the actual baseline. For such individuals, other races may be exciting, 'exotic' a novelty in areas that may include, but not limited to, their sexuality. The notion of self-expansion will be elaborated in the next chapter, 'Marriage and the self.'

Cross-frontier individuals may become more conscious of complimentary psychological factors (emotional/intellectual) as well as non-complementary attitudes, values, interests and personality traits with their partner. On an intimate, personal level, cross-frontier relationships create a situation where the members gradually become less aware of their partners' differences. For example, a couple's awareness of differences in cultural and external physical characteristics (e.g. skin colour) is minimised or put down to the individual personalities and not to cultural variation. In other words, 'otherness' is

no longer perceived in the partner, but is externalised and seen only in the outside culture. This in turn helps them satisfy their desire for a pleasant, supportive relationship with a compatible partner (Rosenblatt et al., 1995). On a similar note, Imamura (1986) postulated that international couples in Nigeria married as a result of interpersonal attraction, and results from her study demonstrated that similarities, more than differences, drew couples together. However, it was also noted that factors pertaining to nationality might have influenced the couples' relationships after marriage.

It is apparent that cross-frontier relationship member 'insiders' are often scrutinised by 'outsiders' in society (societal taboos) such that on any given day they may be subjected to a variety of stares, disapproving murmurs, or even verbal and/or physical attacks (Hernton, 1965, 1988; Simpson & Yinger, 1985). Such reactions by outsiders serve as constant reminders to insiders that, regardless of their implicit or explicit commitment to each other (Johnson, 1991 a, b; Levinger, 1991; Rusbult, 1991), outsiders are constantly challenging that commitment. This is so much so that relationship outsiders (strangers, acquaintances, family and friends), as well as history and custom, generally place enormous pressure on these couples to break up. Charr (1977) acknowledged several cross-frontier motivators and noted that,

*... one must appreciate that the conscious reason given for them might not be the actual one and that it is often the result of a combination of several factors, conscious and unconscious*  
(Charr, 1977, p. 33).

Freudian psychoanalysis suggests that human behaviour is motivated from unconscious needs and forces. In her review of black-white marriages, Davidson (1992) criticised major unconscious and conscious hypotheses where the unconscious views suggested that black-white couples were somehow deviant in that the members chose their spouses as a manifestation of self-hatred and rebellion against family and social norms. However, these authors have been criticised for not recognising that individuals typically enter into interethnic relationships because of love or common interest and that "most mixed marriages are no more 'mixed' than other marriages," (Johnson & Warren, 1994, p. 7). However, a different perspective was suggested in Bizman's (1987) study where he asked Israeli subjects to rate the motivations (money, social prestige, physical attraction, or love), as well as couple compatibility, for those who entered interethnic

Western or Middle Eastern Jewish marriages. The results revealed that the motive of love was rated highest, being a more important motive for interethnic marriages than for homogenous couples, thereby enhancing the symbolic unions of these relationships. However, the Israeli subjects rated and perceived homogenous couples as being more compatible than interethnic couples. This suggests that most of the Israeli subjects felt that love was not enough to describe couple dynamics and to unite the couples together. It should be noted that motives can be depicted as either positive or negative depending on one's orientation.

## **1.2 Psychodynamic view of cross-frontier marriages**

A number of explanations have been put forward for cross-frontier marriage such as love, proximity, a need to be different, practicability, unresolved childhood conflicts, parental influence, founded or unfounded belief systems about other cultures, superiority/inferiority issues, aggression towards another race, idealistic fantasies, and sadomasochistic needs. For example, and based on the work from Sigmund Freud, some social scientists (Goldwert, 1980, 1982; Liebman, 1976) took a psychoanalytic approach in explaining the psychological makeup of individuals in cross-frontier couple relationships. This view suggests that individuals in these relationships express aggression and a scapegoating tendency directed towards their partner from the outside group (inter-group level), yet express sexuality towards their partner on an individual level. This may imply that these individuals are ambivalent about inter-group differences and sexuality, so that they only love someone who belongs to the hated group. Since both the aggressive and sexual instincts tend to be regarded by personality psychologists as 'lower' needs (biologically based or animalistic tendencies), the relationships are frequently regarded in a negative light (Ewen, 1993).

Incidences of psychopathology in cross-frontier relationships and the nature of that pathology are of interest to both sociologists and psychoanalysts. However, sociological studies of cross-frontier marriages are more numerous than psychoanalytic and psychiatric studies, which are relatively scarce. Furthermore, the studies that did have a psychoanalytic approach tended to stress the venting of displaced aggression and scapegoating of an out-group. Davidson (1992) countered three paradigms on a conscious level, which included a) stereotypical sexual preoccupations between races, b) the need to marry for symbiotic social and economic benefits, and c) the desire to

overtly display their relationship to the public. Little (1942), arguing from the psychoanalytic perspective, asserted that there are sadistic and masochistic tendencies between white American women and their Black partners<sup>6</sup>. To both races, violent antipathy to enter marriage serves as incentive to those whose exhibitionistic cravings cry for satisfaction as they receive overt public attention towards them. Although it is not in the scope of this paper to examine skin colour differences in cross-frontier relationships (namely Black/white couples), the viewpoints put forward regarding them may be similar to the negative attitudes the participants in the current study experience.

Clinical observations indicate that many of the psychodynamic factors that operate in mixed marriages are also at work in endogamous marriages, though to a lesser extent. In the light of these findings, Frazblau (1954) concluded that not all mixed marriages are psychologically suspect and that they could actually be successful and happy. According to him, the dynamics in mixed marriages do not portray psychopathology and may be purely circumstantial. For example, they could be influenced by incidences of mixed marriages already existing in families, or determined by narrow or absent religious distance between the couple or intensity of their religious feeling or that of their parents. Frazblau also placed exaggerated fantasies about the sex drives of certain groups (the exotic is erotic) in the category of conscious motivations. His classification of unconscious motivation includes rebellion against the father, blemish-mating (debasement in the sphere of love), combat-mating (a pattern of prolonged hostility permitted toward a mate, but forbidden toward those inside the family), stand-in marriages (partner unconsciously exploited, usually for fathering a child, hence selected from out-group), and reverse-role marriages (where husbands identify with phallic mothers who have mistreated their fathers). The most prominent infantile fixations described here refer to the Oedipus complex in both positive and negative forms, tendency to debasement in the sphere of love, and displaced hostility.

Lehrman (1967), based on supplementary psychoanalytic analyses and on his clinical experience, contended that, in love and marriage, an important determinant is the need for resolution of the Oedipus complex with its complement of narcissism and

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<sup>6</sup> The original study of that time referred to Blacks as Negros. Yet, because of this terms' relative offensiveness/acceptability that has varied so much over time, it was not referred as such in this thesis.

where the choice of object is Oedipal, narcissistic or the combination of the two. Lehrman argued that mixed marriages are more complicated and usually over-determined and so, another pathological feature is over-determination (consistent simultaneous presence in one or both of the mates of many of the psychopathological factors described). Psychopathologies include:

- Unresolved Oedipus complex and incest- taboo (exaggerated phobia of incest).
- Conviction that one is an exception.
- Exaggerated Narcissism.
- Exhibitionism.
- Hostility as a result of disappearance of unconscious incestuous love impulse.
- Debasement in sphere of love.
- Counter phobic and fetishistic attitudes and choices which defend against castration anxiety.

Lehrman argued that mixed marriages among actors, musicians and writers and other artists are well publicized and frequent. With artistic talent, there may be a desire to stand out as being an exception, with feelings that may be more developed than among the general population. However, Lehrman's categories seem to suit the needs of the majority to classify and subsequently marginalise, to ensure their dominant position (economic and social privilege) in society. This may even be more pronounced as these conjectures were carried out many years ago. For example, the US census accuracy checks have shown that errors inherent in racial designation are known and many may have been wrongly registered in marital records (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1964; Golden, 1951).

More recent literature has regarded interfaith marriage as a pathology (Hoge & Ferry, 1981; Zurofsky, cited in Parelman-Judd, 1990) and addressed methods to prevent its occurrence (Belin, 1991). It must be noted and emphasised, however, that the posited psychoanalytic explanations should remain speculative since there is no way of confirming them; any theories put forth have maintained a tenuous stance. Furthermore,

each cross-frontier couple must be considered as its own case study, where both sociological (political context, globalisation, etc.) and psychological issues are considered. Hence, the extent of psychoanalytic theories being applied to these couples may sometimes have merit, while at other times, these theories soundness may be refuted. Furthermore, some of these theories may be outdated in today's context, with globalisation, an increase in international travel and the Internet (amongst other things) contributing to the numbers of cross-frontier relationships. Several studies highlight this position; Imamura (1986) supported the work carried out by Cottrell (1973) where he sided with researchers who stated that international marriages were not a sign of psychological instability and suggested that researchers look at international marriages in a broader context. For example, Cottrell's (1973) study of cross-national marriages between Indian/Western individuals indicated that people involved themselves in these types of unions as an extension of a formerly created international network, as opposed to spouses being introduced to a foreign culture after marriage.

### **1.3 On the positive side: cross-frontier relationship potentials**

The problems presented thus far illustrate a pessimistic representation of cross-frontier relationships. On one hand, these couple members may face a possible danger of assuming there are differences when there are not or that their differences stem from being from different cultures when in fact they may be due to other factors altogether. However, when people begin to understand their cross-frontier partners as people with their own distinctive personalities, they can gain a different outlook and better understanding of their relationship and hopefully use that knowledge to strengthen and better understand their partners. Essentially, they should go beyond prejudicial views and focus on establishing and maintaining a mutually satisfying relationship with the other person, not with a member of x ethnic group. Hence, the same areas of vulnerability for cross-frontier marriage may also render potential strengths. For example, couples may be able to manage differences that others (e.g. communities) are not able to. Furthermore, their ability and success to do so may provide insight and hope to others who wish to resolve conflicts that threaten to break communities apart (e.g. Northern Ireland and Israel). In challenging the status quo, couple members may have long-term relationship commitment at heart.



At the outset of these relationships, individuals may feel that the novelty that accompanies learning about their partner's different (e.g. ethnic) backgrounds is a source of great satisfaction, offering a path towards self-knowledge and growth. These individuals may also learn and develop from the reactions of friends and families, resulting in deeper investment between partners. Moreover, they may also delve into a more thorough preparation, as they reflect and discuss implications of their relationship before making their lifetime commitment to one another. The process of negotiating cultural differences may result in each partner becoming more aware and accepting of their partner's respective differences. The challenge of these relationships involves acquiring and maintaining a genuine appreciation rather than tolerance or intolerance (Baldwin & Hecht, 1995; Hect & Boldwin, 1998) of socio-cultural and ethnic differences between themselves and their partner. They must learn to live with ambiguity and to improvise and tolerate different perspectives.

Furthermore, individuals in these relationships may benefit from anticipating differences and being ready to work them out. This may lead them to realise that personality has less to do with nationality, skin colour, religion or other aspects of ethnicity than with how a person is raised by their parents, or what ideas or books are encountered. From a sociological standpoint (and having relevance to divorce implications), monoculture ethnic partners may presume more similarities than actually exist between them, and although they face less prejudice from outsiders they may mask very real differences between themselves. In other words, these individuals may face the danger of assuming they are similar when they are not.

Differences between cross-frontier partners may result in several outcomes. They may encourage couple members involved to plan and communicate and to develop their capacity to negotiate with each other and with those outside their immediate circle. The increased levels of communication needed for working out differences may thereby enhance self-understanding. Another outcome may be an enriched experience afforded to the couple members involved, as it can open up new worlds, providing access to cultural, linguistic, culinary and other experiences that would not have been available otherwise. These relationships also provide an opportunity for couple members to develop an enhanced mature partnership where each partner follows his/her own beliefs and supports the right of others to do the same. Partners might be less dependent on parents and others to define their values for them and offspring can learn a model of

partnership in which there is tolerance and an acceptance of differences in others. Furthermore, if social support is absent, then a higher than normal level of commitment between couple members may be necessary. Finally, there may be a greater personal expansion felt, as finding love and closeness becomes more special because of the extra stages of effort it takes.

Partners are inevitably conscious of the barriers (parental dismay, social stigma, etc.) set up against them, and as result of their struggle to surmount them, they may acquire strength that comes less readily to homogenous marriages. Most cross-community couple members felt that their commitment had to be very strong to go against family and/or society (Stringer, 1994). In a study of cross-community marriages in a Northern Ireland community, where cross-frontier marriages provided potentially dangerous partner choices, the following excerpt was gathered from an interview:

*If we have a tiff ... I would say, 'Do not forget how difficult it was for us to get here ... If we hadn't felt very strongly about each other, we would have broken it off ... before we got engaged.' Because it really has to be strong, to go against your family and all the rest ... The fact that u marry somebody of different religion means you are more ready to compromise. You are more moderate in your thinking. That alone must make a difference (Stringer, 1994, p. 83).*

To reiterate, it has also been posited that cross-frontier relationship dynamics provide a means for achieving self-transformation. In general, self-transformation is a difficult process for most to execute and undergo in life. Being involved in such cross-frontier relationships may afford an additional arena for adding a new perspective to self-examination, analysis and to a better understanding and realisation of personal needs and even identity. In other words, it may be an opportunity for cross-frontier couple members to strive for and see their different cultural and individual perspectives within a relationship environment as encouraging enhanced self-expression, so that they can extend their intra-physical world. This in turn, ultimately leads to an improvement in areas such as interpersonal skills and confidence, and indeed may help alleviate stresses and problems. Supporting this assertion were the findings in Hawaii, from

Ahren et al.'s study (cited in McGoldrick et al., 1991). The women involved in mixed marriages were more assertive than their homogeneous counterparts<sup>7</sup>.

Hence, it is hardly surprising then that, in the report pertaining to cross-frontier marriages from a Northern Ireland community, the opinion of a number of marriage counsellors was that, by their very nature, these relationships might be all the stronger (Stringer, 1994). No evidence was found to support the idea that cross-community marriages were more prone to breakdown than others on basis of national, ethnic, and religious differences. Moreover, interviews with these couples revealed no problems within the couple members' relationships related to being in their relationships. Of the four broken relationships that were encountered, none were attributed specifically to religious differences, although some commented that their marriage breakdown could have resulted from an additional factor, particularly parental interference. In many cases, most of the couple members in the cross-community relationships had friends who were likewise mixed, thereby providing a means of social support as well as a feeling of relative satisfaction experienced. This study, however, does present several methodological problems, such as its voluntary nature, a possible referral bias in favour of the relatively more successful relationships, and which assumes that they have generally high levels of relationship satisfaction.

Furthermore, the marriages were only conceptualised from the insider's point of view, not from parents, children, church or town. To obtain an overall understanding of couple dynamics, perspectives from others should have been taken into consideration. One major obstacle was the fact that they neglected to contact those couples who never finally married. Also, the fact that they failed to distinguish between information received from couples and from individual partners may have created another bias. Perhaps this would have resulted in a wider range of satisfaction scores.

A retrospective study carried out by Monahan (1966) in the United States illustrated that whether or not interracial marriages have greater or lesser stability depends upon which races were involved. The divorce results, from 1958-1962,

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<sup>7</sup> This assumes that being assertive is a sign of an improved interpersonal skill, although this is not exclusively so in all cultures.

illustrated that interracial marriages between Black<sup>8</sup> and white were more enduring (less likely to divorce) than Black–Black ones in Iowa. Mexicans who engaged in cross-frontier marriages with other whites have only slightly higher divorce ratio than the white- white combinations and Indians in interracial marriages revealed the highest divorce rates/outcomes compared to the other couple pairs. Mixed white-Indian, white-oriental and white-Mexican marriages appear less stable than homogenously married Indian, Orientals and Mexicans. However, these results may have been flawed as the research may have neglected to consider the possibility that the appearance of divorce in cross-frontier groups may have a different time-specific time lag than with homogenous couples. In other words, it may be that divorce appears quicker in cross-frontier couples than with homogenous couples, so that time considerations should be taken into account when drawing conclusions.

Generally speaking, many cross-frontier members face some hardship, usually prejudice from society or family and public expectations that their marriages are particularly vulnerable. If the cross-frontier couple members internalise this view it might lessen their relationship intimacy and affect their relationship dynamics, including their ability to deal constructively with relationship problems. In fact, the reverse was found. Population statistics indicate that mixed marriages are just as durable as homogenous ones (Peres & Katz, 1980). This could be due to their creation of a relationship culture (Wood, 1982, 2000), as a blending of their own individual cultures. Relationship cultures are dynamic (Wood, 2000), implying that relationships and the partners themselves change by context and evolve over time. Relationship cultures created by cross-frontier couples may be more dynamic because of many more inherent differences and challenges they must confront.

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<sup>8</sup> As before (Little, 1942), the original study of that time referred to Blacks as Negros but was not referred as such in this thesis.

#### **1.4 Ethnic identity and cross-frontier relationships**

The definition of the term ethnicity has been examined throughout social anthropological and sociological literature (Dein, 2006) and is related to cross-frontier relationships, as, without ethnicity, there would be no ethnic intermarriage. In general, ethnicity is a complex idea which has various definitions described in the literature, but suggests one or more of the following: common ancestry, shared distinctive culture and traditions preserved throughout generations (and lead to a sense of identity and group), and as collective language or religious tradition (Senior & Bhopal, 1994). Cross-frontier relationships relate to ethnic issues, such as the survival of individual and group ethnic identity.

There are four theories pertaining to ethnicity that are commonly found in the cross-frontier marriage literature, namely, those that believe it is primarily as a matter of interests, those that see it as founded on social networks, those that rate ethnicity by cultural criteria (ethnic culture), and those that maintain ethnicity is really about identity (Spickard, 1989). Cornell (1984) regards ethnicity as being all four of these things. Cross-frontier marriages may or may not be a threat to individual or group ethnicity depending on a) how the individual behaves, b) how the ethnic group behaves, and c) how the wider society behaves, in each of these four areas (Spickard, 1989). The four categories of ethnicity are now described.

Spickard (1989) first notes that some regard ethnicity as being mainly about culture, where their main interest is ethnic behaviour. For example, they believe that ethnicity is defined by people speaking a common language, eating the same food, disciplining their children in a similar way, and expressing the same values. People who regard ethnicity as culture view cross-frontier marriage as a function of acculturation (Spickard, 1989). What interests this group is how cross-frontier marriages affect cultural practices. In other words, do the women in Israeli Jewish & Arab couples celebrate Jewish holidays less regularly than those who have married Jews? Do they still speak Hebrew and raise their children as Jews or do they speak predominately Arabic and raise their children as Muslims?

A second group of theorists perceive ethnicity as being fundamentally about social networks that affect the places where and with whom interactions take place. According to this perspective, places such as Polish neighbourhoods, Italian churches,

Irish pubs, and any functioning kinship groups, are meeting points where members of the same ethnicity can congregate and interact with one another (Spickard, 1989). Do intermarried Poles still go to mass in Polish churches, do they play in predominantly Polish softball leagues, and do they still visit their Polish relatives (Gordon, 1964)? Hence, patterns of interactions are affected by the degree which individuals maintain these social networks. In the case of the present study, do the women in Israeli Jewish & Arab couples still have contact with their immediate family, relatives and/or communities of origin or are these relations cut off? Do they still maintain their social networks with the families and communities they were brought up in? To what extent was their ethnicity affected by being involved in their cross-frontier couple relationships?

Other descriptions of ethnicity exist. For some, ethnicity is essentially about interests and is related to people who share a common heritage, get together to pursue common economic or political agendas. Yet others posit that ethnicity should be considered from an individual perspective, namely that which relates to identity. Those of this contention argue that ethnicity prevails when a group identifies itself as an ethnic group, where it is identified by its neighbours, where an individual identifies herself and is consequently identified (Spickard, 1989). Do the women in the present study, who live in Arab neighbourhoods in a mixed town or in Arab villages, consider themselves to be Muslims, Jews, or both? Still others conceive ethnicity as holding groups together.

It is commonly contended that cross-frontier relationships are an important index of ethnicity. For example, Milton Gordon, a leading writer on American assimilation systems, believes that intermarriage is the basic form of assimilation, a means for a minority group to finally lose its definite ethnic identity, as in the case of creating a mass of homogenous Anglo-American culture: "If marital assimilation takes place fully, the minority group loses its ethnic identity in the larger host or core society," (Gordon, 1964, p. 80). Spickard's (1989) summary describes intermarriage as "one of the most telling indicators of the degree of assimilation of one ethnic group into another," "one of the last rungs on the ladder to final integration and assimilation," and "the surest means of assimilation and the most infallible index of its occurrence," (cited in Spickard, 1989, p. 10). However, the extent to which this is true is clearly debatable. Ethnic divisions continue to persist all around the world, from Sri Lanka to Macedonia to Israel. Essentially, the Israeli Arab population is non-assimilating and its (the community's) separate existence is facilitated through the use of Arabic, Israel's second official

language; a separate Arab school system; Arabic mass media, literature and theatre; and maintenance of independent Muslim, Druze<sup>9</sup> and Christian denominational courts that adjudicate matters of personal status. Hence, it is apparent that ethnicity is still a dominant issue that holds people together and prevents complete assimilation (Spickard, 1989). Consequently, it creates barriers and restricts the amount of intermarriages that occur between individuals in some societies.

In general, and, as illustrated above, the meaning of the term ethnic identity varies throughout the literature and to flesh out an exact definition of the term is a arduous task. Essentially, the concept of ethnic identity is fluid, subjective, and consequently not very straightforward. One of the leading pioneers concerning this notion of ethnicity is Stuart Hall, a cultural theorist in the United Kingdom. In 'Minimal Selves' (Hall, 1993, p. 134-138), an essay that stresses the significance of movement and displacement, and in two recent interviews, one with Kuan-Hsing Chen and the other with Naoki Sakai (Chen, 1996, p. 484-503; Hall & Sakai, 1998, p. 306-378), Hall reflected about his own experiences as a Jamaican who migrated to Britain in the fifties, stressing specifically the formative role that these experiences played in moulding his sense of identity. As Hall explains, the experience of being permanently displaced from his place of origin and being forced to continuously reconstruct himself through new narratives of identity resulted in his being "aware of the fact that identity is an invention from the very beginning, long before I understood any of this theoretically," (Hall, 1993, p. 135). Hence, he argues that ethnicity is a fluid and subjective construct which basically changes with place and time; a person may change his/her identification with ethnicity according to different stages of life and in relation to different situations and interpersonal experiences. This interpretation is consistent with the literature which depicts self-perceptions (e.g. self-concept) being susceptible to situational and environmental changes (Nurius & Markus, 1990). Similarly, McGuire et al. (1978)

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<sup>9</sup> The Druze community is a minority in Israel and they are officially recognised as a separate religious entity with its own courts (with jurisdiction in matters of personal status - marriage, divorce, maintenance and adoption) and spiritual leadership. Their culture is Arab and their language Arabic but they split from the main Arab culture around the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

maintained that the importance of ethnicity in a given social situation tends to fluctuate (increases or decreases) in relation to the extent one's ethnicity is similar to or different from that of others in a given environment or situation. For instance, ethnicity is not just about who one is, but how one feels in and about a particular situation. In other words, ethnicity and related behaviour is considered as a stable sociological trait of individuals that is manifested in the same way at all times, as well as a temporary psychological state manifested in different ways in different situations.

Hence, individual subjective perceptions and mental states are very important in the situational framework of ethnicity. In this tradition, a woman in an Israeli Jewish & Arab couple relationship first identifies which ethnic group(s) she belongs to, and then may indicate how strongly she identifies with that group. Considering that one's concept of ethnicity changes with time and place, it follows that one's ethnic identity is tied to important interpersonal relationships such as a marriage partner. In fact, an extensive amount of research indicates that romantic partners significantly shape people's views of themselves (e.g. Aron et al., 1991; Murray et al., 1996). Aron et al., (1991) observed that people tended to confuse characteristics of their spouse with their own characteristics, implying that their self-representations changed in such a way to include their spouse. Furthermore, Murray et al. (1991) illustrated that one's self-view adjusted over time to become more akin to their dating partner's positive views of them (also see Bosson & Swann, 2001).

Cheng and Hardin (2002) put forward a framework to understand how ethnic identification is associated with interpersonal relationships. The framework suggests that one's level of ethnic identification changes as a function of the ethnicity of the other person with whom one is interacting and the quality of the relationship with that person (according to people's subjective need to bond with or distance themselves from others with same and/or different ethnicity). In other words, ethnic identification is maintained by one's desire to establish interpersonal relationships with someone he/she chooses (e.g. friends, romantic partner), as well as relationships that he/she feels obligated to sustain (e.g. parents, bosses, neighbours). This model implies that people assimilate their ethnic identification towards the ethnicity of others if they have positive relationships, yet express a different ethnic identity from those with whom they have negative relationships. Also noted is that a strong ethnic identification may be helpful for certain people in particular circumstances, such that a strong ethnic identification



may influence one's psychological well-being. For example, Oetting and Beauvais (1990-1991) found that identification with the dominant ethnic group was just as beneficial in preventing drug use as identification with one's own ethnic group. This assertion suggests that ethnic minority's identification with the dominant group could be psychologically advantageous and healthy. This may have several ramifications for the women who converted to Islam in the present study.

Postmodernist writers, such as Hall (1992), have challenged the idea that a person possesses a fixed identity. Accordingly, Hall (1992) contends, "the fully unified, completed, and secure identity is a fantasy," (Hall, 1992, p. 277). This is relevant for the women in Israeli Jewish & Arab couple relationships, for, there is no single Arab-Jewish relationship, there are many (Shipler, 2002). Israeli Jewish or Arab identity is not straightforward and there exists different hybrids, a manifest spectrum, of identities. In the case of Israeli Jews, there is their Israeli identity (nationalistic), their Jewish identity (degree of religiosity, including a spiritual and cultural Jewish identity), and their ethnic identity (commonly categorised into two extensive ethnic sectors: the Ashkenazim, and the Sephardim and Orientals). For secular Israelis, their ties to its Jewish components, of both Judaism as a religion, and the Jewish People as a nation, are tenuous and uncertain. Judaism is gradually disappearing from the lives of the dominant non-religious sector of Israeli society (Yair, 1993). Some of the secular Israelis regard themselves as being 'Israeli' and therefore reject the title 'Jew' as derived from *Halakha*<sup>10</sup>. They maintain that one who is dedicated to Zionism, believes and lives in the modern State of Israel, serves in the Israeli Defence Force, and works for the Ingathering of the Exiles from the Diaspora<sup>11</sup>, is the 'real Jew.' There is an even more complex set of influences for Israeli Arabs, namely Israeli, Palestinian, Muslim/Christian, and ethnic Arab identities, and, perhaps because of this, some components are more firmly held. Furthermore, the two social systems that an Israeli Arab encounters are the dominant Israeli society, and that of the Arab world. In other

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<sup>10</sup> Jewish law and traditions. It consists of a traditional Jewish view.

<sup>11</sup> In modern use, the term 'Diaspora' refers to Jews living outside of the Jewish state of Israel today.

words, Israeli Arabs belong to a sub-set of both of these systems, and the clash between them is felt acutely. These conflicts of personal identity, and of the individual within a society itself in conflict, create a number of severe stresses in the lives of Israeli Arabs: problems of identity, occupational career and sexual behaviour (e.g. premarital sex). So, when an Israeli Jewish & Arab couple form, there is another dimension of identity (as in any couple relationship) that needs to be established, namely that of their identity as a couple. When the two individuals create this union established expression of individual identity may need to be negotiated away in favour of a new couple identity.

### **1.5 Defining the problem**

Israel's population, about six million, is comprised of about 80% Jews and 20% non-Jews, the majority of them being Arabs Muslims (although there is a sizeable Christian community, with Bedouins forming a minority), and some Druze. The tense relationship between most Arabs and Jews within Israel plays a significant role (aside from the obvious general political and economical factors) in the mostly demographic/physical separation that exists between these two ethnic groups. About 29% of Israeli Arabs live in cities that are either mixed (e.g., Acre, Haifa) or Arab-dominated ones (e.g., Nazareth). The rest, 71%, are found in all-Arab villages and cities. There are about 100 all-Arab villages and towns within the 'Green Line.' The current study only deals with mixed (Arab-Jewish) couples living within the Green line.

Arab-Jewish relationships within Israel must be viewed in the wider context of the general national conflict between these two entities, a conflict well known to most of us. Arabs are a minority within the green line because the Arab armies were defeated repeatedly over the last 60 years or so. Hence, inferior numerical and military status, coupled with the perceived notion of being part of, or a potential part of an enemy, had stigmatised the Arab minority there. Personal contacts between Jews and Arabs were quite limited and restricted in the first years following the establishment of the State of Israel. While the Jewish-Israeli society has been strongly influenced by and receptive to 'Western' culture, the Arab minority, especially the Arab-Muslim segment of it (which has been mostly rural), was slow to adapt to the pluralistic and open Israeli democracy. The new socio-cultural situation was conflicting with those at the very base of Arab traditional societies – religion, clan-based economy and politics, and women's status. This of course has changed recently (in some areas only to limited extend), with Urban

Arabs taking the lead. Gradually, Israeli Arabs have become increasingly more vocal and drawn into the general society including its' educational system and politics. Rural Arabs have started to work, study, and live in Jewish and mixed cities. These sustained interactions between the two group, each having unique characteristics of its own, have resulted in some conversions, inter-marriages and other similar mixing phenomena. As more cross-frontier marriages and other mixed personal relationships have occurred, diverse variations in couple dynamics evolved too, partially due to variations in social acceptance and/or circumstances.

There are several key points that need to be emphasised which relates to this study's methodology choice (see 'A combined approach: qualitative and quantitative analysis'). The Arab-Israeli conflict has been one of the most prolonged and seemingly unsolvable national conflicts of the past 120 years or so. It is a prevailing, ongoing, serious conflict. Despite the relatively small area of land in dispute, the conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbours has been the focus of worldwide media and diplomatic attention ever since the State came into being. Indeed, it is arguable that the attention given now is as great as it ever has been. Many countries, individuals and non-governmental organizations in the world feel concerned in this conflict for reasons which include cultural and religious ties with Islam, Arab culture, Christianity, Judaism, Jewish culture or for ideological, human rights, or strategic reasons. To Jews the establishment of Israel is the major positive event of the past 2,050 years, while for most Muslims, the existence of the Jewish state is perceived as a wound in the heart of the Arab nation and Islam. An additional dimension to the conflict has been the ongoing control of Judea and Samaria/West Bank<sup>12</sup> and Gaza since 1967, where the Israeli public increasingly confronts the national aspiration of Arab Palestinian. This of course has also affected the Arab minority in Israel which mostly considers itself as part of that Arab sub group.

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<sup>12</sup> The names Judea and Samaria are often used when referring to the Israeli settlements in that area, particularly by the settlers themselves and their supporters. However, the Palestinians reject this term, as they believe it to be a denial of an area they claim is part of a future Palestinian state. The West Bank is considered Israeli occupied territory by the international community.

Both Jews and Arabs consider the Land of Israel (in colonial terms also known as Palestine) as their homeland/ or part of it. Hence, given that a homeland provides nourishment, permanency, reassurance, and, identification with the soil, there is an enhanced emphasis on its significance for both the two competing groups. The dynamics of the Arab-Israeli Conflict are multifaceted (Gerner, 1991). However, much of the Arab-Israeli conflict is secular, involving issues of territory, security and ethnic and cultural differences. In many respects the Arab-Israeli conflict can be described as nonreligious, resembling those of any national conflict. However, religion is a salient element of the conflict and adds to the complexity of, and an extra dimension to, the unfolding of events. Jews are a unique nation possessing a unique religion over a unique land, while Islam, like Christianity, claims to be universal and Arabs claim a multitude of lands as theirs. Jews and Arabs think of themselves as ethnic cousins and Hebrew and Arabic are of the same language family- the Semitic group. Islam recognises Jewish sources and the evolution of more recent Jewish customs and scholarship were influenced by Islamic culture (notably that of Muslim Spain). Nevertheless, there are deep-rooted prejudices that separate Jews from Muslims. The Arab-Israeli national conflict involves the confrontation over the same land of two sets of historic and moral rights of two national groups. In Shipler's words "to draw the boldest outline of the past is to make Israel's basic case. To sketch the present is to see the Arab's plight," (Shipler, 2001, p. xxxiii). The Arab-Israeli conflict has had, and may still have, an extreme all-or-nothing nature. Nearly all Arabs have felt that Israel does not have the right to exist, at least not in colonial Palestine, and the ideal solution, from their point of view, was Israel's destruction. On the other hand, there have been many Jews who would not accept the existence and political aspirations of the Palestinian Arabs. Understanding the differing language and culture of each group and their opinion about the conflict has been vital for this study's methodological considerations.

#### *1.5.1 Israeli Jewish & Arab couples: a Romeo and Juliet affair?*

Situated within the Jewish-Arab animosity are Israeli Jewish & Arab couples. Given that they are inevitably affected by the extra-ordinary socio-economic, cultural, religious, and political differences present in their society, Israeli Jewish & Arab couples are inherently complex.

*Recipe for an interfaith marriage in Israel: imagine every problem that an interfaith couple or an adult child of an intermarriage can experience in the Diaspora. Multiply the problems by a factor of one hundred, occurring on a daily basis. Stir in an ongoing civil war, bring to an emotional boil (Margolis, 2003).*

Hence, when these couples reside in Israel, as opposed to the Diaspora, the difficulties they face are intensified. The effect of an ongoing war and violence between Israelis and Palestinians, including the frequently cruel behaviour of both sides towards these couples, make for an extremely heightened emotional milieu. Findings from other cross-frontier studies may not generalise to Israeli Jewish & Arab couples given the unique social challenges these couples face. Furthermore, marriages across religious lines are prohibited by law in Israel, so Jews cannot marry Christians, Muslims cannot marry Jews, and Christians may not marry Muslims (Shipler, 2002). If one member of the partnership does not wish to convert to the other's religion then they must travel abroad to marry. Paradoxically, Israel gives legal recognition to cross-frontier marriages taking place abroad<sup>13</sup>.

Perhaps the best known, notable figure, to have been involved in an Israeli Jewish & Arab couple was Arna Mer. Arna Mer was an Israeli woman born in 1929 to Jewish parents in Galilee in what was then known as Palestine. She was a member of the *Palmach* (the strike force of the Haganah, the pre-state Jewish defence organization),

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<sup>13</sup> Under Israeli law Jews can never marry in Israel in any other way but the way which is dictated by the bible. Hence, a cross-frontier (inter-faith) marriage, where only one partner is Jewish, is impossible under current Israeli law. This excludes the majority of the population from any 'civil marriage' because you must have a Rabbi present at the wedding ceremony. Nevertheless, the courts in Israel recognise couples 'living under one roof top and in joint effort' as married including having the right to be a beneficiary of the deceased partner estate (Division). This, however, is a 'marriage by conduct' and the relationship is treated as a marriage but there is no formal seal for that status. Most unmarried Israeli's live under this framework (including gay couples). There is one very inefficient exception to this rule: a Jew and a non-Jew can marry outside of Israel but, in this example, if they will want to end the relationship, they will be forced to go through the Rabbinical system; although the couple did not marry under the laws of 'Moses and Israel' they carry a status of 'doubtful marriage,' and thus in order to have their record clean in the system and to clear their future unborn children from a 'Bastard' status (which will bar the child from marrying other Jews in the future), they must get divorced. Whether to allow civil marriage in Israel is a major debate today but it's an argument aged almost like the country's age itself.

in her youth but later became an anti-Zionist. Soon after the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, she began a lifetime career devoted to campaigning for peace, justice and human rights on behalf of the Palestinian people. She stressed that the words fear, racism, intolerance, contempt, hatred, oppression, ignorance, illiteracy and humiliation were elements that obstructed peace between Jews and Arabs.

*Since 1949, I have struggled for peace, not as an illusion, but a peace that builds up comprehension between human beings. Before 1948, Arabs and Jews were living together in harmony and fraternity. However, in a span of a few months the creation of the state of Israel caused racism and contempt towards the 'Arab', an attitude that did not exist before. Arabs and Jews should live together. This is possible, as not only is there no other alternative, but it occurred in the past* (<http://www.arna.info/Arna/articles.php?id=5>).

Israeli Jewish & Arab couples were more accepted before the Arab uprisings and the escalation of Israeli political problems. Nowadays, the current animosity between Israeli Jews and Arabs is so dominant that it has lessened the acceptance, and consequently, the frequency of such couples existing.

Arna Mer became Arna Mer-Khamis when she married Saliba Khamis, a Palestinian who was the secretary of Israel's Communist Party. Following the six-day Arab-Israeli war of 1967, she was imprisoned numerous times for her activity in various anti-Israeli protests and demonstrations concerning Israeli occupation of the West Bank. It was at the time of the Palestinian uprising, or *Intifada*<sup>14</sup>, in 1987 that Mer-Khamis became aware of the need to create centres for children affected by the violence around them and subsequently she established the organization *Care and Learning*<sup>15</sup> to respond to their needs. All schools in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) were closed

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<sup>14</sup> An Arabic term used to describe the uprising of Palestinian Arabs of the Gaza Strip and West Bank against the Israeli military occupation of these territories.

<sup>15</sup> An organization founded in 1988 that works for the needs of children living in Jenin affected by the violence around them.

from 1988 to 1990 by the Israeli authorities. To enhance the informal, home-based 'popular learning' developed by Palestinian women's committees in this period, *Care and Learning* sent volunteers to the Jenin area regularly at weekends, supplied with paper, crayons and paints, to provide the children with a chance to express themselves creatively. These sessions were held in the streets, with as many as 200-300 children participating. A teacher herself, with a degree in Special Education and Art Therapy, Arna Mer-Khamis developed a graded series of booklets designed to encourage learning in creative, non-conventional ways. Her fluency in Arabic enabled her to teach Palestinian women, who were not teachers, how to use her materials.

After the schools reopened, many children aged eight to 10 were illiterate and many had at one point or another been involved in clashes with soldiers within the territories. In response to this situation, *Care and Learning* opened four Children's Houses in Jenin and the neighbouring refugee camp - educational/cultural centres designed to give the children a sanctuary of quietness, learning and creativity to counteract the hostile political environment. By 1993, the Children's Houses had more than 1,500 children enrolled in their activities and staff that consisted of 15 paid para-professionals and 25 volunteers. When asked about the woman who had founded these Houses, and who was available for the children as often as she could be, a 15-year-old boy at one of the centres said: "She's like my mother. She helps us. She saved us from the streets." Arna Mer-Khamis received The Right Livelihood Award. She died in February 1995, after a lengthy struggle against cancer.

The adult children of Israeli Jewish & Arab couples do not have easy lives. Some couples choose to raise their children as Israeli Jews, others educate them as Muslim Arabs, and some couples treat the children as 'neither' or 'both.' A frustrated Jewish high school teacher, cited in Shipler's (2002) updated version of his book *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in the Promised Land*, said that her classrooms had growing numbers of children of Jewish Israeli-Christian Arab parentage, who were uncertain if they were Jews or Arabs.

The adult children's predicament was highlighted in the story of Israeli movie star Juliano Mer-Khamis. His Arab Muslim father, Saliba Khamis, and Jewish Israeli mother, Arna Mer, were Communist activists. Juliano Mer-Khamis, being a child of a cross-frontier marriage in Israel, tried several identities: serving in the Israeli army as a

Jew, quitting the army when requested to stop his Arab father's relatives at a military checkpoint, living in Europe, making contact with the PLO, rejecting terrorism, and returning to Israel to commence an acting career. He has become a passionate advocate for Palestinian Arab rights.

Juliano Mer-Khamis was also involved with his mother in creating and running the children's theatre in Jenin. He is an actor, and played the part of Julio in *The Little Drummer Girl*, the 1984 film based on John Le Carré's novel of the same name - a story about a female double agent working between Palestinians and Israelis. He recently released a documentary 'Arna's children,' depicting the story of his mother's work and some of the children involved in the theatre in Jenin.

### *1.5.2 Intercultural Marriage and the Political Context in Israel*

Studies have been carried out in Israel that investigated romantic relationships between Arabs and tourists (Bowman, 1989; Cohen, 1971) or intermarriage between Arabs and Jews (Abu-Rayya, 2000) where the political situation impacted these unions in significant ways. Cohen discussed young Israeli Arabs seeking relationships with Western tourists as a result of stress created by the conflict between two societies: Israeli Westernised society representing modernity and Western values, from which Arabs felt alienated, and Arab Middle Eastern society. Cohen believed that relationships with foreigners provided an opportunity to escape the humiliation of being considered inferior with Israelis, through the possibility of marriage and emigration. On a similar note, Ata (2000) observed that, for Palestinians from the West Bank, opposition to intermarriage with Westerners began to change during the 1990s. This could be related to the fact that many individuals saw these unions as a possible escape from the miserable conditions in which many Palestinians live. Indeed, a national census conducted by the Palestinian Authority (1997) indicated that more instances of intermarriage were appearing among the Palestinian population, especially in the cities of Ramallah, Bethlehem, and East Jerusalem (Ata, 2000).

Bowman (1989), in contrast to Cohen and Ata, believes that relationships between Arabs and Western tourists occur as a means of expressing power and of challenging existing economic and political imbalances. They described the sexual relations between Arab merchants and Western tourists as opportunities for the Arabs to express vengeance against foreigners, who were thought to represent the oppressor. As



maintained by Muller (1987), in the relations between the Arab underdeveloped world and the 'First World,' the latter implements procedures that make intermarriages between the two groups difficult. Consequently, these difficulties have the potential to lead to the dissolution of the intermarried families. In line with this are the findings in Muller's (1987) study of Arab-French intermarriages, and Abady's (1991) study on Jewish-Arab intermarriages, where they found that parents and children of such unions often fall victim to a system of hostile bureaucratic procedures. The women in the present study were also affected by the existing Arab-Jewish conflict. Politics can intrude into Israeli Jewish & Arab couples, as the two groups are long-term enemies. Their adjustment is affected by the countries' political climate, such that whenever the hostilities between the two groups flare up, these Romeo-Juliet couples are caught in the middle. The problems in their marriages can arise from within, as well as from the families and society surrounding them. The present study took into consideration the effects of social forces, in particular, the political matrix of the Arab-Jewish conflict, on the women's adaptation in their relationships.

Despite similar origins and culture, and some cooperation between Jews and Arabs in the distant past, the two groups have always failed to understand each other since they met a few generations ago. Delving into the historic circumstances reveals the grave political problem and tense relations between these two groups, creating tension between the peoples of the two nationalities within the State of Israel. The general point to be emphasised is that, because of the political and nationalistic divide, this study's methodology needs to consider the sensitive nature of the enmity between Jews and Arabs. The Israeli Jewish & Arab couple relationship inevitably seeps into political terrain and hardens with the passage of the years. Overall, the positioning of cross-cultural relationships occurs within this societal space in which they are either seen as the norm or, more often, as an exception that needs to be justified and accounted for. It is within this larger framework that these individuals pursue – and *must* pursue – their own personal happiness.

David Shipler (2002) dedicated an entire chapter to interviews with Jewish Israeli-Muslim Arab couples ('The Sin of Love'), as well as made reference to Jewish Israeli-Christian Arab couples in several other places in his book. Shipler's research pointed out that in the 1980s these courageous couples were primarily Jewish women married to Arab men.

The Israeli Jewish-Arab couples, whom Shipler interviewed in the mid-1980s, were generally reasonably happy, living normal, prosperous lives, but they refused to allow him to use their real names in his book. On several occasions, they had been abandoned by one or both sets of in-laws, lost friends, been subjected to physical violence, received verbal abuse and threats, and experienced career problems. They sometimes kept their affairs and cross-frontier marriages secret from family, friends and co-workers for long periods of time. Additionally, some couples that could not endure the intense social pressures against their relationships subsequently broke up.

In Anton La Guardia's *War Without End: Israelis, Palestinians and the Struggle for a Promised Land* (2001), several references concerning cross-frontier (interfaith) family issues in Israel, were highlighted. In particular, the book reveals that social attitudes regarding cross-frontier couples in Israel have not improved since the interviews conducted by Shipler in the 1980s. He quotes one otherwise quite liberal Israeli Jewish woman, who is married to another Jew, excerpt about intermarriage as "a silent, non-violent genocide. It saddens me as a Jew." In other situations involving discrimination, La Guardia comments "there have been cases of Russian immigrants dying as Jews in terrorist attacks, only to be refused burial in a Jewish cemetery because of suspicions that they might be *goyim*<sup>16</sup>." However, for the most part, the academic and psychological literature pertaining to Israeli Jewish & Arab couples is limited; it is important to understand these cross-frontier couple relationships using sociological analysis but a full understanding requires an investigation of individual psychological factors as well. This study aims to carry out a psychological investigation of these couples. Who are the women who enter these seemingly intricate cross-frontier relationships? Is there a common thread that generalises them? Perhaps each woman is able to de-escalate conflict within her relationship, thereby enhancing (rather than threatening) its stability (Rusbult et al., 1991). Perhaps the women's personality tendencies determine how they respond to the challenges confronted in Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships. This may be relevant to understanding why some of the women's relationships succeed and have a high relationship quality, while others may not.

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<sup>16</sup> A Hebrew and Yiddish word meaning someone who is not Jewish.

## 1.6 Conclusion

Partners from different cultures together create a unique family culture. Their choice to marry across national and cultural boundaries seems to either create or enhance openness to multiple cultures for these couples; many have given up rigid national affiliations in favour of an international identity. These same individuals, members of cross-frontier families, claim a wide range of possibilities for themselves with respect to large and small choices they make. Intercultural couple members are free to choose the best elements from their cultures of origin while leaving behind the problematic ones (Gearson & Smith, 2001). For example, an American man married to Taiwanese girl reported:

*...We bring two cultures together ... each one has some good, some bad. We choose the good, leave out the bad. We're very lucky to have two cultures ... I realized that I would never run out of questions for her, never tire of hearing her experience, never think of everything to ask. That's one treasure of an intercultural marriage (Gearson & Smith, 2001, p. 148).*

In the past, marriage across cultures was more prevalent amongst migrants and nationals, wartime lovers or international travellers. Nevertheless, at the present time, many cross-frontier marriages exist between people who meet at institutions of higher learning or international associations, who belong to the upper-middle class of their country and who have attained comparable educational levels. The above traits can be of significance for cross-frontier relationship dynamics, as it helps to have similar social and educational backgrounds; the more a couple share commonality in areas such as values, morals, intellectual and cultural tastes, and general personality style, the better the chance of their relationship succeeding (Romano, 2001). While differences offer opportunities for learning and growth, too many differences may give rise to negative repercussions.

It has been asserted (Romano, 2001) that the essence of love is being able to cross boundaries, which usually implies the boundaries of ego. Few know more about crossing boundaries than cross-frontier spouses who have left the borders and security of their own culture in order to be with someone from a different culture. These same individuals challenge many of the norms that were embedded in them since they were

born, shaping the path they will follow for themselves. It has been argued that intercultural spouses may be considered the last real romantics (Romano, 2001). They are people who marry contrary to accepted norms, who confront extra challenges of diversity in their personal lives head-on, often without the support of their families and friends. These same individuals risk the 'known' for the chartered 'unknown' and consider their love as being capable of overriding vulnerabilities and surviving obstacles in order for them to create a happy life with their partners. At most, their relationship serves as a validation to others that their love is possible. The role of romantic love as a motivation is central to most individuals who enter cross-frontier marriages but the extent to which it is defined is different in different cultures. For example, in many cultures romantic love is not considered valid or a necessary motive for marriage and so is not considered a crucial element for forming a new family. Yet, in other cultures love as a motivation for marriage is an essential ingredient for successful relationships. Clearly the ways in which love is expressed in cultures differs accordingly.

Marriage has become an extremely vulnerable institution. Americans have one of the highest divorce rates in the world and estimates of the probability of divorce range from 42% (Schoen & Weinick, 1993) to 64% (Martin & Bumpass, 1989). More recently, the Census Bureau (2002) cited that 50% of marriages end in divorce (Census Bureau, 2002). In general, divorce rates are increasing worldwide. Even Israel, a nation characterised by relatively very low rates of divorce, has recently experienced an increase in rates of marital dissolution (Katz & Peres, 1995), with many Israeli married couples parting ways. Evidently, there is a need to promote serious investigation into these trends. Techniques should be devised in order to strengthen family relationships and prevent the dissolution of marriages confronted with the extra pressures prevalent in Israeli society, namely constant war and terrorism, hardships of new immigrants, unemployment, inter-ethnic and religious-secular conflicts.

The paradoxical combination of the importance of marriage to individual well-being and its fragility has increased the urgency for social scientists to inquire into and understand the nature of cross-frontier marriages. At a psychological level, there may be no differences between cross-frontier marriages in terms of dynamic and developmental issues; the 'foreign-ness' of a partner may only surface as an explanation for problems when the relationship is under pressure. Falicov (1995) cautions against broad generalisations, noting that:

*... factors that make for success or failure, happiness, or unhappiness in a marriage are extremely complex and cannot merely be reduced to degrees of cultural commonalities and differences (Falicov, 1995, p. 231).*

There are no statistics describing the precise number of mixed marriages that exist among the Arabs and the Jews who live between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea (Shipler, 2002). The variation of the numbers of Israeli Jewish & Arab marriages from sources (newspapers and well-informed officials) may be due, in part, to disagreement about the definition of 'marriage,' and in part of the countries' desire to not recognise such relationships. Right-wing Jews spread scare stories depicting thousands of Jewish women being taken into bondage among confined villages of the West Bank (Shipler, 2002); occasionally some Israeli Jewish women from broken relationships Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships receive coverage in the press, although their stories focus on physical abuse they experienced.

These couples fail to receive much media or scholarly attention and are so fragile that they are cushioned in a hush of secrecy (Shipler, 2002). These couples are tucked away, hidden in the bitter landscape of Jewish-Arab animosity, apparently in the 'dark' shadows of Israeli Jews' and Israeli Arabs' souls. Yet, the Israeli public has also come across various press articles or the occasional fictitious novels and films (i.e. *A trumpet in the Wadi* by Sammi Michael) covering stories of existing Israeli Jewish & Arab love affairs. The stories about these couples have touched on topics such as love, pain, hate, and fear, highlighting a Romeo and Juliet scenario but have neglected an examination of the psychological implications for these couples. Moreover, the scant studies focusing on these couples are primarily sociological in focus or are mentioned only briefly in books.

Essentially these couple members have not restricted themselves by excluding any potential choice of partner from a different background, yet what type of man in the Arab community takes a Jewish wife (or vice versa) and who are the Jewish women willing to enter into such unions, in spite of their community's strong opposition to intermarriage? Is the union exceptionally strong, one that brings the couple together regardless of the culture of intolerance towards each other? These unions are something almost completely unacceptable to Israeli Jews and Arabs, even those living within the

Green line<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, it is not surprising that these unions purposely try to refrain from coming into the public spotlight and, likewise, the country desires to keep such cases away from display. All branches of Orthodox Judaism, both Haredi<sup>18</sup> and non-Haredi, refuse to accept any validity of cross-frontier marriages and so, when an Arab and a Jew wish to marry, they must travel outside the country. In this case, their marriage is not recorded by Israeli officials, or one of them must convert to the other's religion, in which case their marriage is registered as if it were simply between Muslim and Muslim, Christian and Christian, or Jew and Jew.

There is a noticeable gap existing in the marital psychology literature regarding Israeli Jewish & Arab couples. It may be argued that marriage and close relationships are not ideally topics that can be experimented on. In fact, writers such as Giorgi (1970) emphasised that psychology, as a discipline, has been exclusively 'method-driven' and generally tends to focus on topics that can be experimented on (or a quasi-experimental approach), as in the case of Behaviour and Cognitive Psychology. The diluted 'quasi-experimental' approaches, such as a tick box- agenda over the last few decades and are unlikely questionnaire, have neglected emotions from the academics' psychological to venture exhaustively into the complexities of Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships of the current study. Indeed, utilising only quantitative survey instruments in the present study may impose silence, constrain and eschew emotions and experiences that are significant to these couples. These emotional elements are extremely difficult to convey in a quantitative survey.

To a large extent, marriage and relationships are essentially about emotional experience. However, for most of this century the academic psychology has been dominated by the study of behaviour. Conventionally, behaviourism, essentially the experimental study of animals, involved examining the principles thought to motivate human behaviour. This has been investigated primarily through the studies with rats, as

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<sup>17</sup> This was the demarcation between the 1967 borders of Israel and the West Bank territories captured in the Six-Day War. The reference came about because someone used a green pen on the map of the armistice agreement with Jordan to draw the border.

<sup>18</sup> Haredi- any of several sects of Orthodox Judaism that reject modern secular culture and many of whom do not recognise the spiritual authority of the modern state of Israel.

they were (are) cheaper and easier to experiment on than humans, although naturally incapable to converse their thoughts and feelings to researchers. Behaviour was the primary focus because it is the only element of the animal's psychological processes that was directly evident and, therefore, could be easily described and measured. In the behaviourist's paradigm, emotional experience equated at best to a conditioned psychological response (e.g. notion of learned helplessness) and at worst was ignored entirely.

After years of almost exclusively behaviourist research, psychologists and educators became discontented with the limitations of behaviourism. Although behaviourism advances observable and measurable research in the field of psychology, it fails to incorporate psychological thoughts and feelings. Subsequently, the study of behaviour branched into a new school of thought, namely cognitivism. Cognitivism can be traced back to the early part of this century when the Gestalt psychologists of Germany, Edward Chase Tolman of the United States, and Jean Piaget (1896-1980) of Switzerland tremendously influenced psychology, such that a dramatic shift away from, and an end of, behaviourist theories occurred. Cognitivism studied and focused on mental processes, such as memory, attention, mental maps, schemata, attitudes and stereotypes. However, in this cognitive refocusing of the problem, the study of emotional experiences was still not investigated. Instead, what was seen was a transformation of the researcher's 'human being' from a group of conditioned responses to a computer-like rational information system. In fact, Frosh (1989) maintained that (with the exception of psychoanalysis which has always remained outside of mainstream psychology) the history of Western Psychology in the twentieth century excluded emotions from the research agenda. The present study attempts to keep emotions and psychological experiences as the main focus.

To return to the point made earlier, Israeli Jewish & Arab couples have received an almost negligible amount of attention from academics. The limited number of sociological studies and the absence of psychological assessments with regard to these couples can also be related to the unsurprising fact that they are often unapproachable, not wanting to be disturbed, or labelled as 'abnormal' by their surrounding society. Their love relationship is more than a conceptual problem; there is also an emotional problem. The perception of their relationships is that they are emotionally charged, and even more so for those couple members in these relationships. Therefore, it is

unsurprising that some of these couple members have even professed that their love for one-another is more dangerous than the hate between the two cultural groups. Israeli Jewish & Arab cross-frontier relationships are situated at the 'crossroads' between inter-group and interpersonal relations (interpersonal as between two unique individuals, inter-group as denoting the dynamics of different cultural backgrounds).

They may find their internal difficulties magnified by the counter pulls of their separate 'tribal' involvements. The 'crossroad' consideration provides an interesting psychological lens for an in-depth investigation of these couples. It allows the researcher to recognise the importance of simultaneously exploring both these dimensions within the scope of their relationship. Such an approach rarely seems to have been taken in the clinical and interpersonal communication literature (with one or two notable exceptions- clinical work of Schneider, 1990; Urry, 1990; and communications work of DeFransisco 1991 & Berk 1985). Two principle reasons for this failure to elaborate on the 'crossroads' in relationship research may be that a) it is a theoretically difficult thing to do, and b) that a major problem for psychologist is determining what it means to be an 'individual' and, in doing so, continuously challenge the boundaries between the concepts of 'individual' and 'social' (Bhavnani & Phoenix, 1994).

A final pivotal point is that the political turmoil in Israel makes this subject group under study a highly vulnerable topic. Therefore, it is not surprising that such couples are difficult to approach, are generally intensely private and continue to live in 'silence.' A primary aim of this project is to fill the void in the psychological literature associated with these couples. Essentially, this study was set up in order to understand the emotional experiences of Jewish women in cross-frontier Israeli Jewish & Arab couples and provided opportunities for such women to share their life stories. Who are the women who deviate from the norm? The specific qualitative objectives investigated are:

- To investigate the women's background history.
- To understand the women's motivations for entering the relationships.
- To examine the reactions of family and community members towards these couples.



- To look at the quality of these relationships.

The quantitative element of the present study investigates the following two hypotheses:

- Is there a significant difference in relationship quality between these couples and Israeli norms?
- Is there a significant difference in mental health status between these couples and Israeli norms?

The following chapters include: Marriage and the self and the Quality of cross-frontier relationships and the factors related to it.

## **2 Marriage and the Self**

In this thesis, the self is conceptualised in three different modes, namely, the self as identity, self-esteem, and self-expansion. This study includes the aforementioned terms because the self (e.g. self-concept) changes when we form relationships; the women in this study reaffirmed and reformulated their identity through these relationships. The author will now commence this discussion with the self as identity.

### **2.1 Identity and its relationship to marriage: An introduction to identity**

The definitions of identity discussed in the literature are extensive and can be conceptualised in various ways (Stets & Burke, 2003; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Abend, 1974; Greenacre, 1958). For some (e.g. Berzonsky, 1988), identity is a theory of self unique to each individual, motivating certain behaviours while inhibiting others. Essentially, this range of behaviours is useful in organising and interpreting data, helping one make sense of the world, and providing one with a definition of self. Accordingly, Adams and Marshall (1996), asserts that one function of identity is to provide the structure for understanding oneself. Marcia (1993) says that identity is experienced as “a core or centre that gives meaning to one’s world,” (Marcia, 1993, p. 8).

Identity is central to the work of Erik Erikson, (1902-1994), a German émigré and psychoanalyst who had closely studied Freudian psychology (1959, 1968). According to Erikson, identity is “a subjective sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image,” (Erikson, 1970). This study uses the identity paradigm put forth by Erikson when he discussed human development, life crises, and life-span development. Erikson’s theories were used in the present study because he discussed adolescence at length and most of the women in the present study had problematic childhoods/adolescence. One of Erikson’s pioneering contributions was that development unfolded throughout the life span, a view that has become widely embraced. He also developed a theory of psychosocial development that is mainly aimed at understanding how a person achieves a sense of identity and is a characteristic defining one’s sense of self (Erikson, 1959; Erikson, 1965; Erikson, 1966; Erikson, 1968; Erikson, 1970). A stable identity is deemed to be optimal for psychological health and a

failure to achieve ego identity results in ego diffusion, a failure in optimal psychological development. Ego identity is largely unconsciously determined and thus difficult to operationalise and measure.

Erikson theorised that identity has a central personality-organizing function in life. Erikson's theories of child development focused on the interrelationship between a developing child's internal psychosexual development and his or her more external emotional development, emphasizing the interpersonal relationships that arise between the child and its parents (Erikson, 1950). He believed that people develop through their lifetime, in eight different stages, with each stage having its own psychosocial conflict to resolve. The eight stages include *Basic Trust vs. Mistrust*, *Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt*, *Initiative vs. Guilt*, *Industry vs. Inferiority*, *Identity vs. Identity Confusion*, *Intimacy vs. Isolation*, *Generativity vs. Stagnation*, and *Ego Integrity vs. Despair* (Erikson, 1950). In Erikson's theory, the process of identity formation occurs in adolescence, when identity versus identity confusion is the dichotomous challenge.

Erikson coined the term identity crisis, which refers to the confusion, and despair a person feels when they lack a strong sense of identity; someone who loses "a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity." He believed that the crisis is the most important conflict human beings encounter when they go through the eight developmental stages in life. Erikson maintained that each life crisis offers important contributions to one's identity, either progressive or regressive. In the view of Erikson's stages, the onset of the identity crisis is in the teenage years, and only individuals who succeed in resolving the crisis will be ready to face future challenges in life:

*As a quality of unself-conscious living, this can be gloriously obvious in a young person who has found himself as he has found his communality. In him we see emerge a unique unification of what is irreversibly given--that is, body type and temperament, giftedness and vulnerability, infantile models and acquired ideals--with the open choices provided in available roles, occupational possibilities, values offered, mentors met, friendships made, and first sexual encounters (Erikson, 1970, <http://www.haverford.edu/psych/ddavis/p109g/erikson.identity.html>).*

It is this fifth of his eight theoretically specified developmental stages, during adolescence, that is relevant to the women in this study.

Adolescence is also characterized as being a period where autonomy and relatedness dynamics undertake special significance from an individual's perspective. This view is shared by other theorists apart from Erickson. Steinberg and Silverberg (1986) regard 'emotional autonomy' from parents as an important feature of individuation, in line with Anna Freud's (1958) and Blos's (1979) psychoanalytic conceptualisation of adolescence autonomy in terms of second 'separation-individuation process,' (Mahler, 1972). Others (e.g. Hoffman, 1984) also emphasise distancing of adolescent from parents as autonomy (defined as separateness). In fact, the importance of distancing and disengaging of adolescent from parents is a significant phase of healthy development. Hence, it is clear that adolescents are involved in many emotional, cognitive, and behavioural issues. The main points of adolescence are:

- The moving away from the close and familiar security of home and school to the wider variety of people and ideas in the world at large.
- Ownership of the body, which was previously held under a kind of leasing arrangement with the parents; this involves integrating into the body image the newly awakened sexual feelings and fantasies, as well as rapid changes in size and strength.
- The attainment of personal autonomy and becoming a separate person; this is usually taken to mean the establishment of a confidence in and a responsibility for one's beliefs and actions.
- The achievement of intimacy with others, based on secure personal boundaries and a fixed sexual identity.
- Adaptation to the adult world of work and care of the young, with the twin values of the identification and pursuit of personal and career goals, and commitment to agreements entered into and tasks undertaken (Paul van Heeswyck, 1997).

Each stage involves some type of crisis or conflict that must be resolved and only those individuals who succeed in resolving the crisis will be ready to face future

challenges in life. In other words, the identity crisis is a central and a normal part of each individual's development and from adolescence onwards and throughout the life cycle, we all confront a variety of such conflicts. These conflicts are viewed as the 'high' spots in the continuing processes of everyday life. When facing the changing inner and outer tasks that continually confront us, we repeatedly re-anchor or clarify our identity, although we may not be fully aware of doing so. Some of these conflicts are especially intense and are of major importance to the individual, while others may press upon the individual with less insistence and be less critical in terms of further development. However, all these unresolved identity conflicts are seen as constituting particularly vulnerable areas within the personality. Identity conflicts are ever-present but they vary in intensity and significance from one period to another. They are particularly provoked under the pressure of various forms of stress, such as developmental changes during adolescence or mid-life crisis, religious conversion, and entering a mixed relationship. Unresolved conflicts constitute particularly vulnerable areas in the personality. Under the stress of anxiety, these vulnerable areas can be easily triggered, resonated or stimulated, by one or another of these factors. The link between the self as self-esteem will now be discussed.

### 2.1.1 *The self as self-esteem*

In general, identity is an umbrella term used throughout the social sciences for an individual's comprehension of him or herself as a distinct, separate entity. For example, in cognitive psychology (e.g. Piaget, 1896-1980), identity refers to the capacity for self-reflection and the awareness of self. In the course of the twentieth century, questions concerning the nature of the 'self' have been in and out of fashion. Toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when introspection was respectable, the 'self' came very much into fashion (James, 1890). With the rise of behaviourism, however, the study of subjective phenomena was disregarded by experimental psychologists, whilst becoming the focus of clinicians. In recent decades, studies of the 'self' are returning to favour (e.g. Baumeister, 1999; Modell, 1993; Scheibe, 1998; Wylie, 1974, 1979), and in studies of relationships, also, the role of the 'self' is beginning to receive more recognition.

This section begins to look at self-esteem in the context of relationships. It has been posited that the self is fundamentally relational - that is, entwined with significant

others - so that key elements of the self are felt in relation to significant others, even when they are not present (Anderson et al., 2002). Freud (1917) wrote of relationships being transposed from the external world into the self; Fairbairn (1952) wrote about relationships as endopsychic structures; Bowlby (1969) referred to the 'internal working models' elaborated by each participant; and Laing (1969; Laing et al., 1966) differentiated *A*'s relationship with *B* from *B*'s with *A*. More recently, Stevenson-Hinde (cited in Stern, 1995; see also Stevenson-Hinde, 1990) has emphasised how mother and baby form representations of their interactions, which both influence and are influenced by their internal working models, and may carry over into interactions with others. Maslow believed that "beloved people can be incorporated into the self," (Maslow, 1967, p. 103) and McCall (1974) described 'attachment' as "incorporation of... [the other's] actions and reactions ... into the content of one's various conceptions of the self," (McCall, 1974, p. 219).

In line with the view that relationships are salient influences on one's concept of self, it is generally viewed that early experiences can determine how women may develop their concept of self and identity. It has been found that any experience of adversity like physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, results in a sense of self that is predominantly negative in nature (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). Essentially, these experiences decrease their self-competence and sense of worthiness as a developing person (Mruk, 1999). Hence, it is widely believed that an individual's own experiences of childhood relationships with a parent influence his or her subsequent relationships.

Individuals seek out relationships that enable them to express characteristics they believe to be self-defining, and which will lead to them being evaluated positively. Aron and Aron (1986) found that the number of content domains (e.g. social status, family relationships, and major emotions) in students' self descriptions increased as a consequence of falling in love, which was associated also with enhanced self-esteem and self-efficacy. This is relevant to cross-frontier couples. In a study conducted by Shibazaki and Brennan (1998), results revealed that intra—ethnic couples and inter-ethnic couples entered relationships for similar reasons and reported similar levels of relationship satisfaction. However, this study was the first to document a quantitative difference in self-esteem as a function of ethnic dating status, where those involved in inter-ethnic relationships showed a somewhat lower self-esteem than those in homogenous couples. In other words, they appeared to be less positive about themselves

than those involved in homogenous relationships (yet, the study should be from the viewpoint of couple members themselves rather than from viewpoint of outsiders for the starting point of the research). It is questionable to what extent this study is valid as it was conducted on rather a small group of dating couples. Yet, when Shibazaki and Brennan (1998) compared intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic couples at a large south western university in USA, they found no significant difference in relationship satisfaction but, in fact, found that inter-ethnic couple members did report lower levels of self-esteem. However, this study could be biased in regards to a student population and should be replicated amongst other inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic couples in the general population.

In Gurung and Duong's (1999) study, conducted in the United States, mixed ethnic relationships members did not perceive themselves differently to individuals in intra-ethnic homogenous couples in their expectations for their relationship, commitment, relationship quality, nor, for the most part, in what they consider important in dating and marriage partners. Furthermore, in contrast to previous studies, this study did not find any differences in self-esteem, self-clarity or ethnic identity between inter-ethnic relationships members and those individuals in homogeneous relationships. Hence, this study differs from the belief held by most scientists and lay people - that interracial members are different from those in homogenous relationships (Gaines & Ickes, 1997). A review of the literature suggests that mixed relationships are formed between members of high status ethnic groups that lack sufficient self-esteem to date members of their own group, giving them a preference for dating less threatening members of lower status ethnic groups (Porterfield, 1982). High self-esteem individuals who derive their sense of esteem from their ethnic group membership will not risk affronting that ethnic group by dating outside of it. While many studies find that low self-esteem individuals may initiate or accept cross-frontier relationships, it can also be claimed that only high self-esteem confident individuals dare to deviate from societal norms and date outside of their ethnic group.

Following on, it can be suggested that individuals tend to enhance their self-esteem through their formation and involvement with certain close relationships. An interesting and agreeable idea is that research on relationships may be facilitated by greater attention to the self-systems of individuals in three ways. First, the self-concept affects, and is affected by, how the individuals behave. Second, the self-system mediates the effects of culture on relationships. And third, a greater focus on the self-

concepts of individuals may facilitate the integration of research and reconcile different explanations of the same relationship phenomena. In light of the research presented above, what can be suggested about the participant's sense of self in relation to them being involved in Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships?

### 2.1.2 *The self in relationships, a means for self-expansion*

In studies of relationships, the role of the 'self' is important and is related to the following principles:

*First, dyadic relationships involve two individuals, and they concern what goes on between them. Second, they depend on cognitive, affective, and behavioural processes, and they involve a series of interactions over time between two individuals, such that each interaction is affected by previous ones and perhaps by expectations of further interactions in the future. Third, relationships have properties in addition to those of the interactions on which they are based, and interactions have properties additional to those of individual behaviour (Hinde et al., 2001, p. 187).*

Generally speaking, identity is a sense of self and a sense of where one belongs in relation to others. Erikson describes ego identity as "the accrued confidence that one's ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity (one's ego in the psychological sense) is matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others," (Erikson, 1959, p. 89). Josselson (1988) emphasises that identity is primarily an unconscious process that is a crucial aspect of the self. She states that identity is "the stable, consistent and reliable sense of who one is and what one stands for in the world," (Josselson, 1988, p. 10). Josselson (1988) then goes on to conclude "the configuration of a woman's identity at the close of adolescence forms the template for her adulthood," (p. 168). Among the women she studied, she discovered that relationships have a fundamental importance to women and that women move along in the world through relational connections so that whom they know impacts who they become.

Miller (1976) has made a similar point when she says that a central feature of women's development is that "women stay with, build on, and develop in a context of



connections with others. Indeed, women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then to maintain affiliations and relationships," (Miller, 1976, p. 83). Hence, the literature suggests that women construct their identity after or concurrently with establishing intimacy; in other words, women identify themselves in terms of the relationships that they have with others. Aron and Aron (1986, 1995) describe the formation of a close relationship as including the other in the self – a metaphor for describing how the self becomes modified as a consequence of interacting with the other. The self-expansion model of motivation and cognition in close relationships (Aron & Aron, 1986) is composed of two elements, namely the self-expansion motivation and, the view of a close relationship being a means for including each other in each other's self, both of which are among the benefits perceived by those in cross-frontier relationships. Aron and Aron (1986) rationalised that much of an individual's motivational human behaviour is characterized by people seeking to expand not only their physical influence, but also their cognitive complexity (knowledge, insight), their social and bodily identity (by including as part of themselves other individuals, whole groups such as family or nation, and nonhumans ranging from animals to gods), and their awareness of their position in the universe.

In general, this self-expansion motivation initiates individual exploration, competence, and efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Deci, 1975; Gekas, 1989; White, 1959). Once in a relationship, the self expands to include the other in the self. Establishing new relationships, the search for novelty, and the desire to explore can all be seen as involving expansion of the self-concept. Some posit that a person's main motivation on entering a relationship, consciously or unconsciously, is to gain and enjoy the other's perspectives, resources, and so on. Essentially, after forming a close relationship each individual involved includes the other in each other's self. What may have begun as self-centred has become altruistic.

Aron et al. (1991) also argue that love is believed also to be the motivator for which people include each other in each other's self. Love has been defined as "the constellation of behaviours, cognitions, and emotions associated with a desire to enter or maintain a close relationship with a specific other person," (Aron & Aron, 1991, p. 26). Close relationships are especially satisfying, useful, and human means of expanding the self through including each other in the self. Behaviours, cognitions, and emotions are

present in human relationships, but there is an underlying desire, a motivation for a particular relationship.

Hence, the main theme of the self-expansion model as applied to love can be summarized as follows: 1) People seek to expand the self and one means for doing so is by attempting to include others in the self through close relationship; 2) People seek experiences and situations which have become associated with experiences of expansion of the self; and 3) that love is essentially about union, transcendence, and the merging of identities (Aron & Aron, 1996). The idea that, in a relationship, each is included in the other's self is consistent with a wide variety of current social psychological conceptions about relationships.

Self-expansion is inherent in any relationship, in particular, an intimate one. However, perhaps self-expansion is greater in cross-frontier Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships. In other words, the women in this study may want to expand their sense of self more than non cross-frontier couples. The present study considers Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships as a means for providing the women involved with an opportunity for self-expansion.

### **3 Quality of Cross-frontier Relationships and Related Factors**

In addition to the downward trends in marriage and fertility rates, the number of divorces taking place throughout most western countries is of concern. What do the women in this study convey about their cross-frontier relationship experiences with their Israeli Arab partners? Do they provide any insight to render assistance for other similar couples' success?

#### **3.1 Marital and relationship research**

Marital 'quality,' an umbrella term that refers to satisfaction, adjustment and happiness, was a central component of, and subject to, intense research throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The most substantive and frequent descriptor of marriage found in the literature is satisfaction followed by terms relating to various aspects of communication (Fowers et al., 2003). According to Glenn's (1990) summary of the research conducted in the 1980s, "it was a decade marked by methodological improvements and increased conceptual clarity, yet only 'modest' advances were made in understanding 'successful' marriages," (Glenn, 1990, p. 818). This was expected, as many of the studies were performed on couples in therapy, or who were already separated or divorced.

Throughout the 1990s, researchers investigated a variety of topics pertaining to marital satisfaction, but for the most part the accumulated research was still not considered as contributing towards an integrated understanding and depiction of marital relationships (Bradbury et al., 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Furthermore, despite the range of studies and the essential value of the findings, these authors also made it clear that the research was often not clearly linked to, or tested hypotheses derived from, a particular theory. Cumulative findings, based on Karney and Bradbury's (1995) meta-analysis of longitudinal studies, reveal that a wide range of factors is associated with marital stability and satisfaction, including a number of factors that do not have a direct influence on satisfaction, yet are important because they indirectly increase or erode satisfaction and/or stability, by their effect on other marital or spousal variables. For instance, they highlighted the fact that variables may affect husbands and wives differently and characteristics of husbands and wives can affect their marriage differently, but the accumulated evidence suggests that gender differences are often overstated (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

Some researchers, regardless of the relative scarcity of theory in many of the parallel marital studies, have posited explanatory frameworks with varying depth and focus, for measuring and explaining various changes in marital relationships. Hundreds of studies were undertaken to identify the factors that cause, predict, or contribute to dissatisfaction and instability in marriages and relationships. Early age at marriage, violence in the family of origin, and particular patterns of negative interaction and attribution were among the factors that were repeatedly highlighted as being important to marriage and relationship outcomes (e.g. Bowlby's 1969 attachment theory). These frameworks were generally tested in quantitative studies covering a range of individual and couple characteristics. Two well-regarded theoretical frameworks developed were Karney and Bradbury's Vulnerability-Adaptation-Stress model of the trajectory of relationship satisfaction, and Gottman's Theory of Marital Dissolution, including the 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.' These theories are presented below.

### *3.1.1 Karney and Bradbury's Vulnerability-Adaptation-Stress model*

In a revolutionary paper, Karney and Bradbury (1995) advanced a theoretical framework that accounted for changes in marital quality and stability across time and across couples. Developed from their review of over 100 longitudinal studies of marriages and an evaluation of the utility of four frequently-mentioned theoretical perspectives - social exchange theory (as applied by Levinger, 1965), attachment theory (Bowlby 1969), crisis theory (as described by McCubbin & Patterson 1982), and behavioural theory - Karney and Bradbury acknowledged some general themes that could offer the starting point for contemplating how and why marriages survive or break down.

Elements of the four theories emphasise relationship facets that present the foundations for an integrated theoretical framework. For instance, social exchange theory conceives that the perception of a relationship is affected by the rewards and costs associated with the relationship, the sort of relationship the individual thinks he or she is worthy of and their perception of the rewards and costs of being in a relationship with someone else. Attachment theory suggests that certain characteristics of each partner will contribute to the functioning of the relationship. Crisis theory points to events, such as the transition to parenthood or the experience of unemployment that will have an impact on marital quality. Behavioural theory highlights the importance of

couple interaction and how members of couples deal with relational issues, conflicts and transitions.

Based on their analyses of preceding research, Karney and Bradbury recognised three classes of variables that, when pooled into a single framework, reveal salient factors of what can be learnt about the processes by which marital satisfaction and stability change over time. The three key elements of their theory are as follows (Karney & Bradbury, 1995):

- Enduring vulnerabilities: this includes the individual strengths and weaknesses each spouse brings to the relationship. These stable characteristics can comprise their personality, beliefs and attitudes about marriage, their family of origin and social background.
- Stressful life events: incidents, transitions, or circumstances encountered by the couple that can impinge on their relationship and create tension or stress.
- Adaptive processes: the ways in which a couple addresses conflict, how they communicate, how they support each other and the ways in which they think about marriage, their spouse and their spouse's behaviour.

Karney and Bradbury's model put forward various ways in which people manage life events they encounter, which in turn, are the key contributors to the couple's perceptions of the quality of their marriage. Subsequently, the couple's adaptive processes result from the interface between the individual spouse's enduring vulnerabilities and the type and severity of the life events they encounter.

On this note, satisfaction and stability may be somewhat high for a couple who experiences little stress. However, repeated or chronic exposure to stressful events may get in the way of even those marriages where the spouses are generally well prepared in terms of their individual capacities to cope and their particular patterns of interaction. Consequently, life events can impact relationships both negatively and positively, depending on the strength of the couple's adaptive processes (Halford, 2000).

A couple's accumulated experience in dealing with difficult or stressful circumstances will modify spouses' perceptions of the quality of their relationship and vice-versa. In other words, satisfaction with the marriage is likely to lead to more

positive interactions and behaviours, and having positive interactions and behaviour is likely to enhance marital satisfaction and perceptions of quality. Conversely, idealistic and unlikely expectations or dysfunctional patterns of communication may increase the likelihood of relationship problems and a decline in satisfaction over time (Olsen & Fowers 1986; Olsen & Larsen 1989; Sanders et al., 1999). Ultimately, continuous failures of adaptation will destabilise a marriage, leading to an increase in tendency and frequency of contemplation about divorce. On the other hand, successful adaptation will strengthen or support the relationship, thereby reducing the likelihood of eventual dissolution of the marriage.

Karney and Bradbury's (1995) theory brings together personality, family variables, and life events into an integrated framework where the processes fundamental to marital change are clearly identified and examined. The theory put forward by John Gottman, however, is more specific, essentially focusing on ways in which marital quality and stability can be destroyed.

### 3.1.2 *Gottman's cascade theory of marital dissolution*

Gottman's (1993) process theory of a cascade towards marital dissatisfaction and dissolution encompasses both behavioural and social exchange theories. Gottman considered the various factors held responsible for the sharp increase in rates of marital failure (e.g. easier divorce laws, women's financial independence), and illustrated that they did not provide explanations for why some marriages remained in-tact while others dissolved. Contrary to theories and suggestions presented by therapists who developed their material based on work with couples they consulted within therapy, Gottman's theory is centred on scientific research with hundreds of couples over many years.

A principle idea of the cascade theory involves conflict, which is generally regarded as having a negative impact on a marriage. In the laboratory, couple interactions were analysed intensively over a period consisting of about 20 hours and at some point in the session the couples were also videotaped discussing an issue that is creating tension between them. Physiological readings were taken (heart rate), behavioural responses coded (facial expressions, gestures, reactions), questionnaires completed and interviews carried out. The couples assessed their own and their spouse's emotions during the conversation (to measure and estimate how well they read their spouse's emotions). Trained raters then coded the recorded conversation for a range of

emotions such as disgust, contempt, belligerence, and validation. These measures were then correlated with the questionnaire and interview data to uncover the 'hidden emotional dynamics' of the relationship (Gottman, 1994).

Based on his investigation, Gottman asserted that a "lasting marriage results from a couple's ability to resolve the conflicts that are inevitable in any relationship," (Gottman, 1994, p. 28). For example, their conflict resolution depends on their ability to balance positive and negative behaviours. Couples whose positive interactions surpass their negative interactions are referred to as 'regulated,' where marital stability is stronger when the ratio of positive to negative behaviours is at least 5:1. Those marriages where negativity overcomes positivity are categorized as 'non-regulated' and are more likely than regulated ones to be unhappy marriages where separation and/or divorce are or have been considered (Gottman, 1993; Lindahl et al., 1997). While, not all negative behaviours necessarily result in marital distress and dissolution, four behaviours in particular were identified as being crucial to the process whereby a marriage can move towards dissatisfaction and dissolution. Specifically, these behaviours were labeled the 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,' which refer to criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling that occur during marital conflict. Gottman suggests these behaviours can reliably predict divorce where criticism generally leads to contempt, which essentially leads to defensiveness and finally stonewalling (withdrawal).

Gottman's research also revealed verification for a process of change over time in spouses' perceptions of their relationship that leads to a 'distance and isolation' cascade. Eventually, their spouse's negativity becomes so overwhelming, unexpected, and/or intense that it leads the spouse to arrive at a level of desperation where he or she will do anything to end the behaviour. When this point is reached, there is a perceptual shift, where feelings of love, respect and safety are exchanged with feelings of hurt, sadness, being threatened, fear and anger. Once this perceptual shift has taken place, it is often very difficult to view the marriage from any different perspective. Hence, the probability of employing maladaptive attributions that validate a negative view of the reasons underlying other behaviours is increased.

Related studies propose that long-term married couples are more capable of managing their emotions and experience less distress and greater marital satisfaction

than younger and middle-aged couples (Carstenson et al., 1996). This may result from an acquired ability to alleviate conflict with affection; and, perhaps, because conflict tends either to resolve itself over time or its power to threaten or arouse strong emotions diminishes (Parker, 2002). Furthermore, the necessity to settle every issue may lessen over time as spouses' priorities and behaviour modify with the coming of old age (Parker, 2002).

### **3.1.3**                    *Theories applied to marital quality and stability*

Conflict management techniques - how couples manage with their differences, how they quarrel and articulate themselves both verbally and nonverbally - are aspects of marriage that are central to both Karney and Bradbury's and Gottman's theories. Both utilise quantitative approaches, creating measurements mostly from direct observation (Gottman) or from questionnaire responses (Karney & Bradbury). Karney and Bradbury and Gottman investigated marital breakdown as a means for providing an enhanced and different perspective about how marriages can be long lasting, happy and rewarding for both spouses.

This thesis attempts to focus on the 'strengths' of cross-frontier relationships, an investigation that has tended to be investigated using qualitative methods. Despite the apparent common sense in observing this in couples from the same and different backgrounds, relatively few studies have explicitly set out to uncover the 'secrets' of lasting marital success by going directly to the source - long-married/relationship couples themselves.

## **3.2 Marital and relationship satisfaction in cross-frontier couples**

Until fairly recently, marriage and relationship research focused on predicting marital or relationship outcomes, rather than understanding their developmental processes (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Consequently there is a vast body of work wherein a wide range of predictors and consequences of marital satisfaction and/or quality have been investigated. However, the majority of that research has concentrated on the relationships of relatively young couples and has focused primarily on factors that distinguish between distressed and non-distressed couples at a certain point in time,



usually within the first decade of the marriage (Gottman & Notarius, 2000; Sharlin et al., 2000).

Marital satisfaction is defined as an individual's subjective impression of specific components within his/her marital relationship. The proliferation of empirical marital satisfaction research over the past 25 years, however significant it may be, has not been completely translated into work with cross-frontier couples (Barnett, 1963; Cretser & Leon, 1982; Giladie-Makelvie, 1987; McGoldrick & Preto, 1984). Furthermore, much of the relevant literature points to an increased amount of conflict with cross-frontier, as opposed to homogenous, couples (Cottrell, 1990; McGoldrick & Preto, 1984). Differences in expectations, assumptions and convictions exist and are not usually consciously perceived in cross-frontier relationships. In many instances these couples do not know where culture ends and a person begins; what they mistake for anger, indifference or cruelty may instead be cultural differences. Research pertaining to relationships conveys that negative affects in relationships stem, not from incompatibility, but from misunderstanding and faulty interpretation of each other's behaviour (Beck, 1988). Distress may arise because partners disagree about what coping actions should be taken or because each partner typically copes in ways that render the efforts of the other member ineffective.

Many dogmatically contend that cross-frontier marriages may be more complicated than same-background marriages because each partner has their own set of rules, values, habits, viewpoints, ways of relating to others and strategies for negotiating differences. Absence of shared history, cultural, and language may result in misunderstandings and poor communication, factors that have the potential to destabilise any marriage in times of crisis. Matters that may be easily handled in same culture marriages might require difficult negotiations and compromise for partners who come from different cultures. Furthermore, cross-frontier couples may have to manage these matters without any support; some of them may have an underlying fear that others, who are taken into the couple's confidence, may have one-sided views and demand their conformity to social norm (Romano, 2001).

McGoldrick and Preto (1984) stated that "in general, the greater the difference between spouses, the less common the pairing and the greater difficulty they will have adjusting," (McGoldrick & Preto, 1984, p. 348). They listed what they considered to be

significant factors influencing cross-frontier couple members' patterns of adjustment. These are the following:

- Degree of difference in values between cultural groups involved.
- Difference in the extent of each spouse's acculturation.
- Religious as well as cultural differences.
- Racial differences: interracial couples are more susceptible to alienation from both racial groups because of their union and may consequently be forced into couple isolation.
- Sex roles of spouses from each background may intensify certain cultural characteristics.
- Partners with very different socio-economic backgrounds or from cultures that place different value on socio-economic status may have added difficulties.
- Familiarity with each other's cultural context prior to marriage.
- The degree of resolution of emotional issues concerning marriage attained by both families preceding the wedding.

Similarly, Romano (2001) describes significant factors that may impede on (but are not limited to) intercultural marriages and that the same individuals, who may feel novelty about their partner's background, may also feel that differences in ethnic backgrounds may also be a source of great stress. For example, differences in food tastes can be a source of friction and is cited most often as an intercultural difficulty (Romano, 2001). Other differences and problems can include sex-role expectations, male-female roles, perceptions of time, politics, finances, religion, stresses involved in setting up a household, differences in responding to stress and conflict, in how they perceive and experience pain, suffering and illness, expectations and attitude towards work and leisure, holiday tradition, expressions of affection, problem-solving strategies and place of residence.

The decision as to where to live is often a significant issue for couples from different countries. Hence, where they decide to live (nation, urban or rural) will affect

their relationship and may be problematic for one of the couple members: “now, you're with the man you've always wanted in a place you do not belong,” (Romano, 2001, p. 69).

Creating and maintaining friendships is another difficulty for cross-frontier couples, due to obstacles such as prejudice, racism, and/or language barriers to name a few. Some couples may become too isolated, or one or both of the couple members may become too dependent on the other, which may eventually result in their having too much of each other's company: “an isolated couple is neither a happy nor a healthy one,” (Romano, 2001, p. 90). Even extended family can prove to be problematic, invading a couple's privacy and sometimes instigating arguments. Family involvement may be a double-edged sword and some couples bond more closely as a reaction to unsupportive parents. Meanwhile, others cite external influences as causing more problems, arising because one family or the other causes more conflict, than any other issues facing the couple. A similar social background is an important ingredient in any marriage, but it seems that the crossing of social classes is more prevalent in intercultural marriages than in mono-cultural ones, which may provoke difficulties (Romano, 2001).

Differences and disagreement about these issues may take the form of partners blaming each other for not understanding or being unreasonable, rather than attributing difficulties to differing cultural traditions. It may be that these differences hindered cross-frontier relationships and, hence, impacted upon their marital well-being and satisfaction. Spickard (1989) studied satisfaction across cross-frontier marriages between Japanese women and American men after World War II. In this study, several dyad types were surveyed: Japanese women/non Japanese husbands, European war brides/Japanese American husbands, European woman/non-Japanese husbands and Japanese women/Japanese American husbands. Results indicated that heterogeneous couples were more satisfied in their marriages than homogenous pairs. By contrast, other researchers indicated marital interaction for these international unions ranged from unhappy to pathological. Consequently, Spickard concluded that there exists little evidence to support a higher rate of failure for those war-bride couples and that intermarriage couples experience the same high and low stressors as those contained in intra-marriages. Similarly, Chan and Wethington (1998) studied 91 interracial as well as 174 homogeneous ones and found that marital satisfaction of interracial couples did not

differ from individuals in mono-cultural ones. Marital satisfaction of Asian wives in intermarriage unions was higher on average than Asian wives in same-race unions. Whereas spouses in religious homogenous relationships were more likely to have higher marital satisfaction than spouses in religious heterogamous relationships concluding that the type of interracial marriage may be a determining factor of satisfaction. However, conclusions made seem tentative as a better sampling of the two populations should have been carried out, as well as a qualitative measure (interview) to support the quantitative method (Dyadic Adjustment Scale).

In another study (Durodoye, 1991), contradictory results were found when examining for differences in factors related to marital satisfaction in Nigerian male/African female and African American couples. Results revealed significant differences between the two types of couples in areas of overall marital distress, time together, disagreement over finances, and conflict over childrearing. Intermarried couples consistently expressed greater dissatisfaction on each of these scales. Perhaps it was the cultural group differences that exacerbated feelings of marital dissatisfactions in the two aforementioned studies, as different cultures perceive cultural similarities and dissimilarities differently. Supporting this idea was the study performed by Heller and Wood (2000), in which they examined 25 intermarried couples using 'The Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships Demographic Attitudinal Questionnaire.' They found no differences regarding level of intimacy, similarity of intimate experience, or mutual understanding. However, in-depth interviews revealed differences in the pathways by which the groups arrived at a similar level of intimacy. Graham et al. (1985), in semi-structured interviews of 62 homogeneous and 108 intercultural marriages, found that, although intercultural couples reported more external problems than homogenous couples, they both appeared equally satisfied with their marriages. Furthermore, a shared faith did not completely lessen differences in the type and quality of marital problems. Similarly, Gurung and Duong's (1999) study, consistent with the work made by Shibazaki and Brennan (1998) and Henrikson (1996), found that mixed-ethnic and homogeneous couples had similar levels of relationship satisfaction and had similar expectations for relationships.

In general, conclusions about cross-frontier marriages and satisfaction vary across the literature. Cretser and Leon (1982) reviewed literature concerning intermarriage and investigated such variables as age, number of previous marriages,

number of children and marital stability. Studies indicated that homogeneous intra-racial couples tended to be older than interracial couples and that interracial marriages tended also to involve previously divorced persons, a fact in itself that could be an explanation for less marital satisfaction. It seems that the degree of success attained by cross-frontier marriages is unknown and varies according to population groups and various variables.

### 3.2.1 *Marital stability*

Marital stability refers to a couple's resistance to relationship deterioration. Divorce statistics between homogenous and heterogeneous couples are contradictory. Data showed divorce statistics of interracial couples to be equal, higher, or lower than those of homogeneous racial couples (Cretser & Leon, 1982). Cottrell (1990) emphasised that research into cross-national marriage couples tended to stereotype couples as prone to divorce, without closely examining cultural factors impinging upon the likelihood of divorce. A previous review of literature by Barnett (1963) revealed a similarity to that of Cretser and Leon (1982). Unfortunately and importantly, each of these reviews neglected to look at any specific factors pertaining to marital satisfaction and cross-frontier marriages.

The fact that cross-frontier couples have higher divorce rates in some studies may only reflect a relative independence of individuals who choose to marry outside their own ethnic group; such individuals may be more willing to break any unsuccessful relationship than those homogenous couples. Looking at marital success and stability in terms of divorce rates is not a good method, as more cross-frontier couples tend to be second or later marriages for one or both partners than homogenous racial marriages (Ho, 1990) and these second and later marriages tend to be relatively unstable, due to a variety of external factors, such as presence of adolescent children from partners previous marriages (Cherlin, 1989). The incidence of remarriage has an influence on cross-frontier marriage studies, so in order to eliminate its effect only primary (1<sup>st</sup>-1<sup>st</sup>) marriages should be selected for analysis.

Perhaps it is also improper to compare divorce proportions between cross-frontier and homogenous marriage proportions over the same number years as the pattern of average duration of appearance for divorce may not be the same for same-race as for cross-frontier marriages. Perhaps same-race marriage cases of divorce

require more time to show themselves in the divorce picture than cross-frontier ones, hence the percentage of cross-frontier divorce could account for a higher percentage. As indicated earlier, time considerations should be taken into account when comparing divorce statistics.

One study (Monahan, 1970-71) reported that previous findings (Carter & Glick, 1970), which supported the theory of cross-frontier marriages being relatively less stable than homogeneous ones, may be flawed. Carter and Glick's (1970) results were based on the 1960 US census data, about which there are serious doubts as to their accuracy and significance. For example, military personnel are those who were likely to have entered into cross-frontier marriages abroad and probably did not re-license their marriage in the US, a factor that could contribute to the number of divorces but not to marriages. Hence, it would serve to inflate the divorce picture. Monahan's study found that, contrary to popular and sociological belief in the past, for which there was no objective and quantitative proof, Black-white marriages in Kansas did not portray any tendency to divorce, but rather showed more stability than for homogenously married Blacks<sup>19</sup>. The likelihood of interracial marriages enduring seems to depend upon the particular races involved, the social circumstances surrounding them at the time and the nature of marital choice (motivation) itself. The present study assessed the participant's relationship stability by asking the women if they ever separated from their partner, and, if so, how many times they separated.

### 3.2.2 *Marital distress*

There is evidence that depressive symptoms are related to interpersonal distress. For example, in Whisman's (1999) review of marital literature, he found that, across 17 cross-sectional studies, marital quality negatively related to both depressive symptoms

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<sup>19</sup> As in the cases before, this original study of that time also referred to Blacks as Negros. Yet, because of this terms' relative offensiveness/acceptability that has varied so much over time, it was not referred as such in this thesis.

and diagnostic depression<sup>20</sup>. Whiffen & Johnson (1998) suggested that both social support from close others and social provisions within marital relationships might be important in understanding the onset of depression. Accordingly, there is a strong inverse relationship between quality of close relationships and depression that suggests a robust link between depression and relationship difficulties in general. Time and again, the literature reveals that depressive symptoms are related to interpersonal distress such that marital discord is present prior to the onset of depression. In a study of depressed women, Paykel et al. (1969) found that marital difficulties, especially arguments, were the most frequently reported events prior to the onset of depression. In non-clinical populations, longitudinal studies have indicated that marital adjustment predicts an individual's depression later in life (Beach & O'Leary, 1993; O'Leary et al., 1994), thus confirming the effect of marital distress on the heightened risk of depression.

Despite the debate about the accuracy of divorce rates reported among cross-frontier couples relative to homogenous couples, there is scant evidence to support the assertion that these marriages involve more distress than homogenous marriages. In the absence of directly compared cross-frontier and homogeneous marriages, there is a difficulty to determine if couples in cross-frontier marriages actually experience higher levels of distress. In one study of stressors in marriage, Hedgeman (1987) concluded that marital stress experienced by interracial couples was not different from that experienced by black couples and white couples.

Marital distress may lead to, rather than result from, depression. Evidence reveals that marital distress precedes depressive episodes. For example, Weissman and Paykel (1974) found an increase in marital disputes was the most frequently reported event among their sample of depressed women prior to requesting treatment. Brown and Harris (1978) interviewed large samples of community-living women and depressed patients and their relatives. They reported that the lack of a confiding, intimate

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<sup>20</sup> Depressive symptomatology (bad mood, irritability etc.) differs from depression as a diagnostic category. There are specific criteria in the DSM (Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental disorders) for the diagnosis of depression (e.g. duration of symptoms). A depressive picture may be present alone or alongside other symptoms of pathologies without constituting a clinical syndrome.

relationship with a spouse or boyfriend was one of four factors associated with women becoming depressed when faced with major life events or chronic difficulties (also Costello, 1982). Freden (1982) found that depressed individuals reported perceiving their spouses as being excessively demanding and burdensome, particularly in the period prior to the onset of their depressive episodes. It seems plausible to suppose that marital dysfunction may precede depressive episodes. Finally, Shrout et al. (1986) demonstrated that, compared with non-depressed community controls, depressed patients experienced a significantly greater number of events in the year prior to the depressive episode in events that include losses, physical illness and injury, and events disruptive of the social support network.

### 3.2.3 *Social networks, social support and loss*

Social support begins in utero, is best recognised at the maternal breast and is communicated in a variety of ways, but especially in the way the body is held (supported). As life progresses, support derived increases from other members of the family, then from peers at school, work or in the community and perhaps in a case of special need, from members of helping professions. In general, social support protects against depression (Cobb, 1976) when confronting extensive life changes, stresses and crises. Esteem support encourages a person to cope, to confront and attempt to master problems with confidence. Additionally, emotional support and sense of belonging provide a safe and secure base from which self-identity can change and adjustment can most readily take place. Forssman and Thuwe (1966) found that wanted children adapt to and/or cope with stresses of growing up, better than those who started out with a parental request for abortion that was denied.

Cross-frontier marriages may involve at least one partner who is stigmatised by society. Goffman classified stigmas pertaining to 1) race/ethnicity 2) nation of origin, and 3) religion as “tribal stigmas that can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family,” (Goffman, 1963, p. 49). Cross-frontier marriages have the potential to draw unwanted attention toward the ‘stigmatised’ (minority) partner, the ‘normal’ (majority) partner and also the offspring. Initially, couples may face disapproval or social awkwardness with friends and families. In more extreme cases, financial and/or emotional estrangements may occur and couples may face negative reactions towards their commitment. Friends and family may infer motives for



choosing a partner who is culturally different, such as rebellion, inferiority complex, or denial of one's own cultural group. Based on the above, it is not surprising that researchers have suggested that, over time, outsiders' disapproval may erode relationship satisfaction and may even account for higher divorce rate among couples composed of individuals from different interracial backgrounds (Gaines & Ickes, 1997; Rosenblatt et al., 1995). Rosenblatt et al. (1995) stressed that it is racism, not race, which creates troubles for interracial couples.

In the case of cross-frontier marriages, potential losses and misunderstandings are involved where both partners take some risk for love and adventure. As presented in the conversations with intercultural couple members (Grearson & Smith, 2001), an often un-resolvable problem was the loss of place, culture, and family that resulted from one partner's leaving his/her home of origin. The immigrant partner in the couple almost invariably expressed longing for his/her own landscape/climate and deep sadness about distance from extended family members. The immigrant spouse experienced separation from his/her roots, culture, social ties and taken-for-granted pattern of life. This in itself can be a traumatic separation and also affect the traumatic entrance into a new society. Entering an unfamiliar cultural context in which old habits and contingencies no longer apply can result in cultural shock (Oberg, 1960), role shock (Byrnes, 1966) and role strain (Guthrie, 1966), all of which cause uncertainty which lasts until the migrant becomes acquainted with the new cultural matrix. Furthermore, the status of being a 'stranger,' a migrant deviant or immigrant, can sometimes result in uncomfortable situations. Host societies are ambivalent towards them as it may raise feelings of uneasiness for them. Moreover, Guthrie (1975) explains that host society members avoid contact with migrants because of their limited capacity to express themselves fluently in the new language, resulting in an interaction that may seem superficial to the fluent interlocutors such that they tire and refrain from developing personal relationships. The immigrant has to deal with a new culture, new language, unknown customs and norms as well as undefined or poorly understood demands.

In Rosenblatt and Tubbs (1998) qualitative study on cross-frontier (multiracial) couples those interviewed expressed losses of religion, language, and cultural identity to pass on to children. Loss of support from family and friends, loss of identity, losses in finding places to visit or live, losses because of one's children having to deal with racism, and loss of status in community were also revealed. The same couple members

also reported experiencing racist attacks and/or eradication of family roots/ of one or both couple members. Some may even continue to experience feelings of hurt after relationships with family of origin have in some sense been healed. Certain individuals seem to be more susceptible to experiencing depression following the loss of a personal relationship and there is a strong empirical association between 'social exit' and fateful loss events (many of which involve loss of a person) and depression (Brown et al., 1987; Paykel, 1979; Shrout et al., 1989). Indeed, a review of the literature indicates that depressed persons have smaller and less supportive social networks than non-depressed counterparts. The concept of loss can also applied to stressful events- depression can have expanded definition involving loss of meaning or loss of something of value to one's self-concept (Finlay-Jones & Brown, 1981) or loss due to prejudice and racism. Indeed, the theme of loss recurs many times in reference to the causes of depression.

An investigation of 15 professional Iraqi men and their non-Arab, mainly European, wives indicated the likelihood of the wives converting to the Muslim faith after marriage (Al-Agailai, 1992). It was suggested that a failure to conform to the identity of the majority group might result in one or more partners experiencing social isolation and a sense of exclusion from the community, rituals and routines, which can support family life. Moreover, a withdrawal of social and economic support, discrimination and in extreme cases, physical attack may result. However, even reducing these socially obvious differences in order to facilitate marriage (perhaps from pressure to join the rest of the family) could still leave wives in conflict with their social environment. In other words, the feeling of being a foreigner in one's own family can persist and individual identity threatened. Furthermore, the power balance in a relationship is likely to favour the indigenous partner in terms of language, familiarity with surroundings, networks, procedures, social support and legal rights (Clulow, 1993). This is identified as one of the 'areas of vulnerability' for cross-frontier marriages.

#### 3.2.4 *Social support as a moderator of life stress & relationship quality*

Perception of available social support and satisfaction with social support are influenced by an individual's personality, such as attachment style, emotional stability and extraversion (Sarason et al., 1985; Von Dras & Sieglet, 1997). In other words, an individual's subjective belief that support is available is generally a better predictor of major outcomes, such as health, than are objective assessments of person's social

support network (Sarason et al., 1994). In fact, some investigators argue that an individual's generalised perception of their social support is a more important predictor of positive outcomes than are specific supportive behaviours provided by their partners (Lakey & Cassady, 1990). For this reason, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with the women in Israeli Jewish & Arab cross-frontier couples to assess their perceived social support.

### **3.3 Conclusion: enduring relationships**

A criticism of the general marital and relationship research pertains to the preoccupation with examining how relationships break down. In the case of cross-frontier couples, many social scientists posit that they experience greater threat than homogeneous couples and are more likely to dissolve, obscuring reasons why many of these relationships are enduring, satisfying and even happy. In fact, many cross-frontier relationships remain intact for very long periods. Family functioning literature (e.g. DeFrain, 1999), has provided an alternative approach in which the focus is on the strengths possessed within family units and structures. This has been transferred onto cross-frontier relationship literature so that the qualitative research question of interest becomes what can we learn from the narratives the Israeli Jewish women convey about their experiences with their partners, Israeli Arab men.

## 4 Methodology

### 4.1 Overview: methodological details

As mentioned previously, there were obvious intrinsic cultural and gender barriers encountered when interviewing with the women's partners, Israeli Arab men. Specifically, a cultural taboo in talking about emotions to the interviewer, herself being female, existed. Furthermore, given the complexity of recruiting these subjects, the interviewer only managed to recruit 10 Israeli Arab men, which was not sufficient to provide a saturation of themes from their narratives. Hence, this study's aims were narrowed to describe and understand only the emotional experiences of women in these Israeli Jewish & Arab cross-frontier couple relationships. Specific qualitative objectives were:

- To investigate the women's background history.
- To understand the women's motivations for entering the relationships.
- To examine the reactions of family and community members towards these couples.
- To look at the quality of these relationships.

The quantitative element of the present study investigates the following two hypotheses:

- Is there a significant difference in relationship quality between these couples and Israeli norms?
- Is there a significant difference in mental health status between these couples and Israeli norms?

As indicated previously, when used, Israeli Jewish & Arab couple relationship refers to a stable relationship formed of heterosexual partners: one, the female, being Israeli Jewish and the male, an Israeli Arab.

#### 4.1.1 *A combined approach: qualitative and quantitative analysis*

In general, studies on cross-frontier relationships have traditionally relied on archives and other published sources for the foundation of their work. Yet, studies of Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships are scarce. For this reason a qualitative approach relying on ethnographic materials, including in-depth semi-structured interviews and field-work, was considered an appropriate measure for the examination of these couples. Furthermore, interviews are especially fruitful with individuals, or groups of people who have not had a voice in the psychology literature, as is the case of Israeli Jewish & Arab couples. Through their very nature the interviews offered this under-represented and marginalised minority sample group the opportunity to express itself, providing a forum and an outlet for subjects to talk about their material, emotional aspects, and life experiences; it allowed the participants to describe and disclose their subjective inner realm. It also allowed an examination of each woman within the context of her family, and within her cultural, social and broad historical contexts. At the same time, interviews were used to gain a unique perspective on existing literature. The window into these people's life histories via interviews is a major advantage of qualitative over quantitative methods (Duelli-Klein, 1983) and provides a greater understanding of the ways in which people perceive and interpret the events in their lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Gamson, 2000).

However, the researcher also believes that the crux of the research objectives and aims could not be captured by only one research method. The decision was therefore made to use a combination of assessments that incorporated in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews, and quantitative assessments. This constructive interplay of assessments resulted in a closer investigation into the women's lives, and permitted the uncovering of a wide range of different interpretative life histories. Hence, the results from the qualitative methods informed the quantitative questionnaires, and the results derived from these quantitative assessments provided detailed data of direct relevance to the interpretation of the information derived from interview. Applying a quantitative analysis alone would provide only a superficial assessment of these women.

#### **4.2 Pilot interviews and the formation of interview questions**

This particular subject group required prudent planning and sensitivity when being approached, as well as a careful construction of the semi-structured interviews. It would have constituted insufficient recognition of these factors to have proceeded with

the inclusion of the Israeli Jewish & Arab minority participants without careful development of research instruments, procedures and protocol.

During the pilot studies, issues about relationship quality and mental health emerged such that the researcher decided to assess these aspects more thoroughly with relevant structured questionnaires. Furthermore, in the pilot studies and when speaking to interviewees over the telephone prior to actual interviews, the researcher noticed their evident scepticism about their participation in the study. Consequently, having the subjects fill out the questionnaires beforehand would have not only been difficult to achieve, but could also have created an additional bias. Hence, it was decided that questionnaires would be administered to participants following the interviews.

The researcher reviewed three cases of preliminary interviews as a pilot in order to check the validity of the questions asked. This was necessary to avoid creating an exploitative relationship with the interviewees and, at the same time, to avoid biased or otherwise problematic assumptions in the questions directed towards the women. It was during the pilot interviews that it was noticed that brief hypothetical and wide-ranging open questions – covering a range of issues related to cross-frontier relationships as opposed to specific and very detailed questions – yielded the most detailed responses. Semi-structured, rather than structured, interviews created a comfortable atmosphere for participants, which was more conducive to generating an investigation of a standard range of topics. When the researcher received answers to questions that went beyond the question, or provided new areas for exploration, modifications of standard questions were made in order to elicit further responses. This allowed the women to engage more fully, and to identify with the questions at a more manageable distance. It was believed that failing to acknowledge this ‘distance’ between directly reporting stresses and tribulations of their relationships could represent, in Goffman’s terms, ‘a threat to face’ for people (Goffman, 1982). These discussions were assumed to enhance the interviewee’s potential to follow their natural train of thought, and allowed them to bring out interview material that was more reflective of what they would say or do in real-life situations. Hence, the semi-structured interviews were casual and friendly on the one hand, but directive and impersonal on the other.

Effective rapport between the interviewer and interviewee emerged as a critical success factor of the research. When in the pilot studies the researcher was asked if she

was Jewish and she had replied “yes,” she encountered resistance from participants, which may have affected the rapport between the interviewer and interviewee. Hence, the researcher attempted to portray herself in a neutral manner during the data gathering process by calling attention to her own mixed background, and by not emphasising her Jewish identity. Furthermore, not underlining the researcher’s Jewish background and identity was a necessary safety precaution: in one of the pilot interviews the researcher felt vulnerable and in danger when visiting an Arab village and stating her identity. Given the political situation and concerns regarding security, a Jewish identity could have had the potential to generate problems when travelling to other Arab villages or neighbourhoods<sup>21</sup>.

The researcher also approached the people listed below to comment on the validity of interview questions as well as provide several modifications to the pilot interview process.

- An Israeli Arab psychologist was consulted to broaden the researcher’s understanding of Arab society. This psychologist currently works with Arab patients and is part of an Arab family living in an Arab neighbourhood in a mixed town. In addition, an Arab Sheikh was contacted in order to obtain information relevant for general cultural practices, and on the design and environmental settings for interviews.
- The researcher's supervisor – a practicing psychiatrist, psychologist and anthropologist – provided critical insight into the formulation of the interview questions. Amongst others, this led to the crucial sequence of questions as well as the avoidance of stereotypical biases.
- An Israeli Jewish psychologist helped decide which questionnaires would be used. In other words, valid questionnaires were chosen if they had been

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<sup>21</sup> At times, the researcher felt vulnerable in the Arab villages. She was a female western foreigner who was conducting fieldwork alone in unfamiliar surroundings. In one instance, on the way to the interviewee’s home, the researcher was asked if she was Jewish and she replied “no” to avoid any potential problems.

translated into Hebrew and Arabic and had previously been used reliably on Israeli samples in other studies.

- A prominent Israeli literary author, Sami Michael, was interviewed. Sami Michael has written much on this subject area. Specific topics covered were the problems of working with this 'taboo' couple culture and their sensitivity to direct questions. The interview provided 'insider' information about potentially sensitive and threatening questions and the choice of words habitually used by the sample group. It also dealt with the topic areas which were appropriate and acceptable to the study's sample group for direct questioning and which questions needed to be devised in an indirect manner, given the sample group's sensitivity to inquiry.
- Additional contributory interviews were with: members of research institutions (the Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem, and Palestinian social work researchers at Hebrew University); social workers and a supervising psychologist working with battered women who have left abusive Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships (the researcher also attended an instructional session between a consulting psychologist and social workers who work at a hostel for battered women).
- Also located and interviewed were individuals who had left their cross-frontier relationships, as well as those who failed to progress with a potential relationship. These sources were used to provide insider 'guides' to the relationship dynamics, and proved useful when devising interview questions.

In the above cases, assistance and support was received regarding the formulation of interview protocol and generation of interview questions in order to achieve a manner familiar and sensitive to the interviewees. Hence, fieldwork, social interactions and cultural context with various Israeli Arab and Jewish community members were incorporated and were imperative for the study's progress. Insight into both Israeli Arab and Jewish perceptions and their cultural aspects provided an overall conceptual perspective essential for this study's interview protocol, and subsequently, for the fruitful outcome of this research. In other words, this study necessitates a need to be as culturally embedded as possible (e.g. dressing etiquette, greeting etiquette, how to



be a guest etiquette, etc.). The format of the semi-structured interviews is depicted in Appendix A.

### **4.3 Selection**

Women were accepted as participants in this study if they met the following selection criteria: being in an Israeli Jewish & Arab couple relationship, providing consent to be included, and their relationship existing for a period of more than six months – whether co-habiting or married. The researcher accepted both native-born Israeli, and immigrant women for inclusion, with the additional criterion for the immigrant women that they had to have been resident in Israel for at least 10 years. Israel is a land of immigrants – for example, Russian immigrants from the past 16 years comprise nearly 1/5 of the total population – hence, it would have been unreasonable to exclude the Jewish immigrants to Israel who are involved in intimate long-term or married relationships with Israeli Arabs.

When defining Israeli Arab in the study it should be noted the difference between Palestinian citizens of Israel, otherwise referred to as Israeli Arabs, and other Palestinians communities, especially those in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The current project only focused on women involved with Israeli Arab (Muslim or Christian) citizens living within the green line of Israel, a line that demarcates the borders between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which is recognised by the international community. Israeli Arabs can be subdivided into Muslims, Christians, Bedouins and some Druze. The Druze community in Israel is a minority one and was excluded from the present study for the following reasons: 1) the Druze are a closed sect (they are much more conservative in Israel than in Lebanon) and those involved in cross-frontier relationships are very rare; and 2) relative to other minorities, Druze believe in loyalty to the country in which they live. The Druze community in Israel has a special standing among the country's minority groups and members of the community have attained high-level positions in the political, public and military spheres. Nowadays they serve in the Israel Defence Forces and the Border Police and therefore they lack some of the tensions, hostility and conflict in their relations with the Israeli Jews that is so inherent between Arab and Jewish sectors. Hence, for the above reasons, the present study excludes couples where one partner is a Druze.

#### 4.4 Recruitment and limitations of this study

Due to the low frequency of these couple constellations (less than 1% of the population in Israel), any attempt to find participants in the random sample of general population would have been very expensive. For this reason, targeted recruitment and purposeful sampling was carried out.

In an attempt to 'get inside' the subject group circle the couple members were mostly selected through personal referrals and word of mouth (i.e. snowball referrals)<sup>22</sup>. Recruiting in this manner was a major means for identifying and contacting participants to avoid their natural inclination of keeping to themselves, living discreetly not wanting their personal lives and 'selves' exposed in an avid attempt to avoid enduring any additional strain, unwanted publicity and a possibility for a loss of reputation. Furthermore, they may be politically sensitive and/or have already been overburdened by requests for interviews. This was a major means for potential participants to participate in an interview in this study due to the unusual sensitive nature of these relationships. The Israeli society is characterized as being collectivist and inter-personal (Mayseless & Salomon, 2003). Having a personal connection and link resulted in a higher positive participant response rate.

Psychologists (both Arab and Jews) and social workers in several towns and cities were contacted as well as a Jewish Orthodox outreach organization that opposes such unions (Lev L'Achim). Representatives of various Israeli Jewish & Arab co-existence projects, and co-existence schools (e.g. Neve Shalom), in several cities were also contacted; the researcher was invited to various co-existence events (e.g. 'Musical Dialogue' - a performance involving Israeli Jewish & Arab students and musicians in the performing arts). Field work also involved attending various community cultural centre

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<sup>22</sup> The problem of randomness (in terms of sample characteristics) when it comes to special populations was considered. Researchers usually make an effort to draw a representative sample (by random sampling, for example) when they conduct research on normative phenomena, because they want to be able to generalise results to a population at large. However, such a generalisation is not the aim of research on a small population that represents a unique, small-scale phenomenon (small scale in terms of numbers, not of importance). In cases like this (i.e. this study's sample), a snow-ball sampling is an adequate procedure.

activities in mixed cities (e.g. Haifa, Jaffa). These centres organised intercultural activities (e.g. Jewish and Arab cooking classes, learning how to play Arabic instruments, music concerts, and art exchange), which encouraged relations between the two groups. The researcher eventually became friendly with one Arab family who lived in an Arab neighbourhood of a mixed town; the family provided links and identified potential participants. In fact, nine of the study's participants were approached through the help of this particular Arab family.

A variety of other, yet unsuccessful, methods were also employed to recruit participants, including placement of Hebrew and Arab flyers describing the study in local libraries, Universities and institutes across the country (Haifa, Tel Aviv, Ben Gurion), co-existence centres (Givat Haviva)<sup>23</sup>, and the New Family organization (Mishpacha hadasha)<sup>24</sup>. A description of the study, in Hebrew, Arabic, and English was also posted on several websites/forums specializing in cross-frontier relationships ([www.interfaithfamily.com](http://www.interfaithfamily.com), and the Israeli HaAretz Internet website forum that specializes in mixed Israeli nationals relationships), although no participants were found through this method. Letters were also sent to Arab and Jewish leftist members of the parliament in Jerusalem for relevant information and contact details of potential study participants. Published newspaper articles, broadcasts of such couples on Israeli TV, and relevant documentaries portraying these couples provided an additional, yet again unsuccessful means, for targeting potential participants. Published lists of Israeli organizations (e.g. Adalah, New Israel Fund, and Agency of Middle East) that deal with Arab rights were also consulted in order to locate potential participants.

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<sup>23</sup> Givat Haviva was founded in 1949 and is Israel's oldest and largest organization working for civil society, peace, tolerance and democracy.

<sup>24</sup> Mishpacha hadasha (New Family) is the first organization in Israel dedicated to advancing family rights and the rights of individuals within families. Led by experts in the field of law and civil rights, New Family is a human rights organization working to achieve legal recognition of every family unit in Israel to ensure equal rights for every type of family.

Potential participants were initially contacted by phone in which case the investigator had the opportunity to explain the research study and its purpose. Participants were then asked to participate in the study. Acquiring agreement from subjects was a difficult task; Individuals involved in Israeli Jewish & Arab couples do not generally seek out publicity, and many times when potential participants were contacted they did not agree to participate or hastily hung the phone when hearing about the research study (40 individuals).

The method used for overcoming this natural caveat was to offer to send literature through the post that elaborated on the subject matter of the study. Potential benefits of participation were emphasised, including the fact that the interviewees experience and feedback, while retaining anonymity, could help other women in similar relationships. The researcher sent them a letter with a list of literature (newspaper articles relevant to similar couple pairs) and emphasised the uniqueness of their relationship. The letter was written in both Hebrew and Arabic to underline the researcher's neutral position and so no bias existed from the study's inception.

The researcher expressed a natural and heightened curiosity and fascination about the creation of, and the dynamics of their relationships as to acknowledge the need, and value, of their participation (Landrine et al., 1995). The end result was that 29 women targeted over the phone and/or approached in person did agree to be interviewed.

#### **4.5 Participants – background and demographic factors**

As many factors played a role in this study, it is vital in this overview to outline the background and demography of the current sample in order to gain a better understanding of the women involved in these relationships (information was obtained from a background questionnaire).

Table 1 below describes some background information about the participants.

**Table 1.** Participant's demographic information

Id	Age (yrs.)	No. of yrs. in relationship	Residence (city/village)	Religiosity of family of origin	Conversion to Islam
1	39	18	Jaffa	Not religious	Yes
2	37	21	Jaffa	Religious	Yes
3	24	5	Jaffa	Not Religious	Yes
4	47	35	Jaffa	Not religious	Yes
5	58	30	Jaffa	Religious	Yes
6	47	27	Jaffa	Traditional	Yes
7	49	30	Jaffa	Not Religious	Yes
8	65	39	Jaffa	Not Religious	Yes
9	65	35	Jaffa	Religious	Yes
10	33	15	Jaffa	Religious	Yes
11	24	4	Ramle	Not Religious	Yes
12	44	14	Tel Aviv	Not Religious	No
13	25	3	Tel Aviv	Religious	No
14	56	31	Netanya	Traditional	No
15	29	3	Tel Aviv	Traditional	No
16	38	11	Afula	Not Religious	No
17	32	4	Haifa	Traditional	No
18	46	12	Haifa	Traditional	No
19	56	16	Haifa	Not Religious	No
20	56	23	Haifa	Not Religious	No
21	39	8	Haifa	Not Religious	No
22	32	8	Arab village	Traditional	No
23	53	30	Arab village	Religious	Yes
24	62	12	Arab village	Religious	Yes
25	47	35	Arab village	Traditional	Yes
26	47	35	Arab village	Traditional	Yes
27	47	24	Jerusalem	Traditional	No
28	36	6	Jerusalem	Religious	No
29	45	24	Kibbutz	Non Religious	No

Additional background information about the participants is found below in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Participant's details

Variable	Frequency (N=29)	Percentage
Education qualification		
1 Grammar School	6	20.7
2 High school	14	48.3
3 Professional degree	1	3.4
4 University education	7	24.1
5 Master or higher University degree	1	3.4
6 Other	0	0
Marital status		
Married	22	75.9
Cohabiting	4	13.8
Widow	3	10.3
Live temporary apart	2	6.9
Current Occupation		
Independent professional	5	17.2
Management	7	24.1
Business	2	6.9
Unemployed	13	44.8
Other	2	6.9
<i>If separated at one point in their current relationship</i>		
Yes	7	24.1
No	22	75.9

The women who partook in this study had a range of experiences and backgrounds. The interviewees grew up in 11 different cities and towns across Israel. Twenty-seven (93.1%) live with their Israeli Arab partners and two (6.9%) reported that they live apart. Furthermore, the participants described troubled childhoods. Three (10%) of the women reported a childhood background where their parents divorced, three (10%) of the women were divorcees, four of the women (10%) experienced turbulence in their parental home (physical and verbal aggression), four of the women (14%) had one parent die before they were 16 years old, seven (24%) of the women described one or both of their parents as being absent while growing up. As more stories unfolded, so too were more instances of trauma discovered. Seven of the women (24%) reported a problematic relationship with father-figure, three (10%) spoke of having an on and off relationship with one of their siblings and four (14%) ran away from their parental home at one time. No comparisons were made between the present study's sample group and the Israeli population regarding the family experiences depicted.

## 4.6 The interviews

### 4.6.1 *Ethical considerations and informed consent*

Once the potential participants indicated their willingness to participate in the study an interview location and time was scheduled according to the interviewee's preference and convenience. The interviews were conducted by the researcher and were carried out in an environment selected by the participant- either their home, the informal setting of a coffee house, cafeteria, or workplace. An attempt was made to ensure a hospitable environment for participants. Consequently, the interviewees chose the setting of the interviews, as it was believed that the research setting should foster a hospitable feeling for the participants because of its sensitive nature. It was assumed that conducting interviews at the participant's home would render the most informative accounts, as they most likely feel most comfortable in their own home.

As mentioned earlier, all participants were given detailed information about the study and what their participation would entail, prior to commencing the interview process and informed consent was sought before commencement of the interviews. All participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any time, including their right to discontinue the interview.

When obtaining consent, the researcher informed the participants about (1) the purpose of the research, expected duration (approximately one to three hours), and procedures; (2) their right to decline to participate and to withdraw from the research once participation has begun; (3) the foreseeable consequences of declining or withdrawing; (4) reasonably foreseeable factors that may be expected to influence their willingness to participate such as potential risks, discomfort, or adverse effects; (5) any prospective research benefits (their cooperation will hopefully benefit other couples in, or considering, similar relationships); (6) incentives for participation; and (7) the researchers contact information for questions about the research and research participants' rights. It was stressed that data would be dealt with in the strictest confidence and that the researcher would not disclose in her writings any confidential, personally identifiable information regarding the research participants unless pseudo names were used and other reasonable steps - such as removing any unnecessary personal data - were taken when using their interview material for the study.

The potential vulnerability of participants was considered. Where there might be any doubt about a participant being comfortable with participation or any signs of undue anxiety during the process, the researcher declined to interview them further. In eliciting in-depth information about their relationship experience and childhood upbringing, the interview could potentially trigger unpleasant memories and feelings of distress.

The researcher also asked the interviewees if they agreed to the interviews being recorded. Interviews would be tape recorded for translation and transcript production, for interpretation of data, and to ensure accuracy of quotations. Tape recordings were transcribed and anonymised by the researcher, with names and identifying features removed. The interview did not commence until the interviewees consented, in writing, signing an informed consent document, to the above terms and to participate in the study. This secured a guarantee that the researcher would go through great lengths not to disclose anything that might lead to recognition.

#### 4.6.2 *Framing the interview*

Upon arrival to the interview site, the interviewer introduced herself again, informed the participant about her background and gave a thorough explanation of the research study. The interviewer spent time getting to know her interviewees thereby establishing a rapport and, hopefully, creating a sense of sincerity and trust on the part of the interviewer. Active listening, as opposed to simply administering questionnaires in an automatic fashion, was carried out in order to create an atmosphere of genuine desire to hear and understand the participants' life experiences. As far as possible, the researcher attempted to draft a non-judgemental approach.

Generally, informants were interviewed only once in order to avoid a possible scenario where the participants may be eager and quite willing to supply information in the first interview, yet, because of the time lag between the first and second meeting, a degree of resistance may have potentially developed, making information that could have been available on the same day no longer available. Furthermore, if questionnaires were left with participants to complete independently, they may neglect to return them to the researcher.



#### 4.6.3

#### *Interview schedule*

Topic areas were routinely introduced and basic questions were asked in the same, systematic, format for every interview. On occasions, the interviewer paraphrased the participant's responses in order to make certain and clarify what was said as well as to encourage her to continue with the narrative. Standard prompts were employed when the interviewee failed to engage or address the main question (i.e. "tell me more about...; that's an interesting point; I understand... anything else you would like to add?"). This also involved being prepared by offering counter-examples, questioning and so forth. The researcher was also aware that recounting experiences might cause distress to some of the participants therefore it was emphasised that the participant could terminate the interview at any time.

The questions asked during the semi-structured interview fell under the following guideline categories for interview protocol: the pre-relationship stage, the meeting stage, the subsequent relationship, questions relating to children (if relevant), their relationship, and any significant issues. Naturally, not all questions were asked but did provide a framework for thinking about the interviews. Furthermore, respondents answered most of them without being asked all the questions through the life stories they described of their own volition.

The interview protocol generally reviewed the following categories (see Appendix A for a complete description of interview questions):

- Family of origin, childhood relations (family and social) and upbringing.
- Motivations for entering the relationships.
- Family's reaction to their relationship.
- Expressions of racism encountered.
- Current relationship and family functioning.
- Relationship dynamics and satisfaction.

Following the termination of the interview, the researcher allowed for a debriefing period to provide an opportunity for participants to express additional

thoughts, feelings and questions elicited by the interviews. This was done in order to demonstrate respect and to offer them something personal about the researcher, thus creating an atmosphere of comfort.

#### 4.6.4 *Issues of interview reliability and respondent validation*

In two instances, the researcher went back to visit participants to obtain further information relating to their relations with their parents whilst growing up. In both cases second interviews were in line with initial ones.

#### 4.6.5 *Eliciting themes and coding*

All but two (which were in English) of the interviews were conducted in Hebrew. With the aid of a tape recorder and a word processor, the spoken Hebrew narratives in the interviews were translated and then transcribed onto a computer into English taking into account cultural context. When transcribing everything heard, repetitions, non-words, incomplete utterances, pauses, and affective expressions (laughs, signs, weeping, and so on) were included.

The interviews generated a vast amount of information about the participant's life histories and everyday lives. Content analysis was then used to analyse data. This involved eliciting themes and placing them into relevant categories. This essentially organises the very large body of transcripts and makes them more manageable for interpretation and for generating inferences.

The interview material and their readings were naturally multi-layered and complex. As a result the transcript text was reviewed several times to uncover emerging themes. The researcher stayed within the transcript text for as long as was necessary for personal empathy and insight to grow from within the data itself, throwing light on the patterning of the women's particular lives. The transcripts, therefore, were not approached with any formal, pre-set categories and codes with which the data were to be fitted and compressed; instead, the researcher attempted to minimise interviewer bias and remain as open as possible to what the material might suggest about the individuals personality dynamics, the unfolding of their lives, the constantly changing and interactive patten of experiences, feelings and conflicts all set within social and cultural contexts. Analysis of the data indicated a degree of saturation.

To check for reliability, both the researcher and her supervisor independently reviewed transcripts. There was complete agreement (100%) in themes that emerged in the interviews between the researcher and her supervisor accounting for a faithful amount of reliability. Analysis of the themes was thereafter performed based on the above considerations.

#### **4.7 A quantitative analysis**

Appropriate and valid quantitative measures were chosen for the study and the hypotheses tested. Following the interview, questionnaires were given to the subjects in an attempt to delve deeper into their individual psyche. Questionnaires were given only after the interview was completed, as it was believed that interviewees would be more comfortable after establishment of a credible researcher-participant rapport. The first step in the quantitative component was to complete a background questionnaire that would identify demographic information, as well as various personal details and motives for entering their relationships (see Appendix C). The sample of the present study was then compared to Israeli norms, women in the general Israeli population. Hypotheses relating to these two groups were posed:

- Is there a significant difference in relationship quality between these couples and Israeli norms?
- Is there a significant difference in mental health status between these couples and Israeli norms?

Two instruments, namely the Israeli Marital Quality Scale and Brief Symptom Inventory (in Hebrew), were administered to the study's sample group. An evaluation of relationship quality for the women in Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships was then performed by conducting a series of t-test comparisons between the female participants in the present study and those from the control group (based on data provided from Lavee & Ben-Ari's 2004 study). The researcher justified that t-tests were acceptable to use in the study's non-random sample.

- There are various ways to assess intimate relationship qualities but The Israeli Marital Quality Scale (I-MQS), developed by Yoav Lavee (University

of Haifa), which can also be used to measure non-marital intimate relationship quality, was chosen. This instrument is based on the American ENRICH (Olson et al., 1986) measure and the modified shortened version (Fowers & Olson, 1993). The original instrument is a 10-item Likert-type scale that assesses the respondent's perceived quality of his or her marriage across 10 dimensions of the relationships. Fowers and Olson (1993) reported good reliability estimates of the short ENRICH scale as well as high concurrent and predictive validity. In the modified Hebrew version (Lavee, 1995), items and response categories were adapted to decrease the response set. Instead of the original Likert scale, in which items are ranked between fully agree and fully disagree, each item is given two extreme response categories and the respondent is asked to check a number on a scale ranging between a score between 1, the lowest, to 7, the highest (e.g. 'when we have conflicts or disagreements: [1] We always come to an agreement, [7] We seldom are able to bridge our differences'). A scale of this type (see, e.g. Antonovsky, 1987) was found to be less influenced by social desirability than the typical Likert scale. The modified version was found to correlate only modestly ( $r = .16$ ) with social desirability scale (Lavee, 1995). This instrument has also been translated into both Hebrew and Arabic, has separate male and female versions, and is commonly used and applied to the Israeli population. The items evaluate relationship satisfaction, communication/adjustment, conflict resolution, financial matters, leisure activities, sexuality, child-rearing, kin family relationships, satisfaction with house labour, and trust. Relationship quality scores for the comparison control group were provided by previous study results conducted (Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2004) and were used to investigate if there were differences in relationship quality between the participant's in this study and those in the control group (taken from previous studies). In order to reduce the data from the scales to relevant and appropriate factors, the scale directionality for five items on the I-MQS was first reversed for easier analysis. Items in reversed direction are recoded during data analysis so that the scores are in the 1 through 7 (low to high) range. The seven item points were then assessed over the same scale direction. The internal reliability  $\alpha$  value for the I-MQS was 0.81. The results were then compared with Israeli norms.

- Psychological distress and symptomatic behaviour was assessed using the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI, Derogatis & Spencer, 1982), a self-administered questionnaire composed of 53 items on a five-point Likert-type scale of distress ranging from 0 (not at all) to 4 (extremely). The Hebrew version of the BSI was administered. The items describe a variety of problems and complaints, ranging from trouble remembering things to feeling lonely, feeling nausea, strain, and various other emotions. This is a short version of the basic 90-item Symptom Check List, SCL-90-R (Derogatis, 1977) and contains nine sub-scales relating to somatisation, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobia, paranoia, psychoticism, interpersonal sensitivity and obsessiveness. Questions were grouped and then a summed result was placed into sub-scale variables (somatic symptoms, obsessive symptoms, interpersonal difficulties, anxiety, depression symptoms, hostility, phobia, paranoia, psychotic symptoms, BSI sum and finally, the BSI mean was then computed). This objective test was used as it would have been difficult for the researcher to evaluate mental health states during a single interview. The study sample's results were then compared with data from the control group (Adult Israeli Norms), provided by previous studies (Gilbar & Ben-Zur, 2002). Israeli norms served as the comparison group due to the necessity of remaining within the specific cultural framework in which the empirical studies were conducted; Israelis may experience a heightened level of stress factors when compared to other Western societies, which may be due to the ongoing state of war, intensified by religious and political divisiveness that reflect the national milieu (Gilbar & Ben-Zur, 2002). Consequently, if the current socio-political situation in Israel affects feelings of distress then its effect should be consistent with the various psychiatric problems assessed by the BSI (Gilbar & Ben-Zur, 2002).

Essentially, this part of the study examined relationship quality and mental health by focusing on one very specific, but real issue: Israeli Jewish women involved in cross-frontier Israeli Jewish & Arab couple relationships. Do the women in these couples experience greater relational distress (more vulnerable) compared to Israeli women involved in Jewish-Jewish and Arab-Arab couples? Or do the women in these particular couple relationships experience comparable or greater relationship well

being/happiness than those Israeli women involved in Jewish-Jewish and Arab-Arab couple relationships (more resilient)? Are there certain repercussions of such relationships such that there is a link between relationship dynamics (relationship success or failure) and mental health?

Finally, after informants completed the questionnaires they were fully debriefed and permitted to ask the interviewer questions. An opportunity was also given to participants to add supplementary comments without being tape-recorded. They were then thanked for their participation and cooperation and were given a box of sweets as a token of appreciation for their time.

## **5 Quantitative Results**

This study's field work was conducted between November 2003 and November 2004 using a combined methodological approach, namely the method of questionnaires (quantitative approach) and the method of semi-structured interviews (qualitative approach). However, during the research process, attention was dedicated mainly to the micro level of the research interest (i.e. to the intimate inter-partner and interfamily relations), as well as to the subjective dimension of the women's experiences and interpretations of their relationships.

Overall, 29 women in the present study filled out various questionnaires and participated in the interviews. According to Cohen (1992), the sample size of 29 is sufficient to detect large effects at the .05 level of significance. Furthermore, a variety of methods were used to recruit subjects and so there is no particular reason to suspect a bias in the sample recruited compared to those not recruited. In other words, there are no significant reasons to conclude that the sample is unrepresentative. Hence, the quantitative tests may provide generalised conclusions and insight for the present study's sample group and allows us to make some useful observations with respect to the women's relationship aspects and mental health. A demographic questionnaire was first administered to the participations in the battery of quantitative measures. Relationship quality and brief symptom inventory questionnaires were then administered to the women. In order to test the question, whether or not the study's sample had higher or lower relationship quality and mental health status than those women in the general Israeli population, t-tests were carried out with both the Israeli Marital Quality Scale (I-MQS) and brief symptom inventory scores<sup>25</sup>.

### **5.1 Relationship quality measured by the Israeli Marital Quality Scale**

The I-MQS questionnaire was given to the 29 women and the statistical computer program SPSS was then used to conduct the analysis. The mean values for the study's sample (Group 1) and Israeli-norms (Group 2), the control group, and their

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<sup>25</sup> A t-test is the appropriate statistical procedure for testing differences between means and is acceptable to use in the non-random sample.

respective relationship question components were first calculated independently of one another. Scores for the 10 factors on the relationship quality scale are listed in Table 3 below, where a score of one is the lowest and a score of 10 is the highest. The components listed are placed in order of mean scores for the Israeli Jewish & Arab couple members. A t-test was then used to compare and determine if differences in relationship quality existed between the two groups.

**Table 3.** Marital Quality Scale comparisons between study sample and Israeli norms

Relationship Quality Factors	GROUP 1 Women in Cross-frontier relationships Sample (N = 29)		GROUP 2 Israeli Norms (Jewish women partnered with Jewish men) (N = 296)**		T-test results
	M	SD	M	SD	
Emotional communication	6.48	0.91	5.85	1.39	2.39*
Trust	6.31	1.54	6.47	1.03	0.76
Relation with Family	6.21	1.42	5.75	1.43	1.65
Conflict resolution	6.21	1.07	5.69	1.45	1.88
Financial matters	6.00	1.25	5.80	1.54	0.68
Sexual compatibility	6.00	1.83	5.74	1.46	0.89
Parenting	5.85	1.35	5.27	1.64	1.84
Personal characteristics	5.72	1.73	5.15	1.41	2.03*
Leisure time	5.69	1.56	5.06	1.72	1.90
Role division	5.62	1.72	5.36	1.62	0.82
<b>Avg. Marital Quality Total</b>	<b>6.01</b>	<b>0.88</b>	<b>5.62</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>2.14*</b>

\*\*Note: Israeli norms are based on data from Lavee and Ben-Ari (2004).

\*p < 0.05

Overall a difference was observed between the 'mean of the means' of the two groups' Marital Quality Scale, averaging out all 10 categories measured, where the t-statistic was 2.14. This categorical result suggests that on this particular scale, women in Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships scored higher than norms suggesting that they might therefore have better quality relationships than women in non- Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships. The data shows that this difference was statistically significant at the 95% level.



For two of the items, namely Personal Characteristic<sup>26</sup> and Emotional Communication, a difference between the means was also found that was statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. For emotional communication the t-statistic was found to be 2.39 ( $M = 6.48$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ), whereas for personal characteristics it was 2.03 ( $M = 5.72$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ). This suggests that on average the women in the study's sample reported higher scores than Israeli norms on the items personal characteristics and emotional communication with their partners (in response to the statements 'to what extent do you accept your partner's personality and behaviour?' and 'how much do you and your partner discuss feelings and experiences' respectively). The results therefore indicate that the women in these relationships accepted their partners' personality characteristics (character) and behaviour. They also reported that they and their partners engage in emotional communication. The results seem to suggest that they are 'better' partners than those involved in Israeli Jewish-Jewish and Arab-Arab couples. Possible reasons for these results will be discussed in sections chapter 9.

Consistent with this implication was the finding that, although no other means for relationship component indicators were statistically significant, there were other differences observed. For example, conflict resolution, leisure time (to what extent they share and enjoy similar activities and outings) and parenting also showed clear differences.

## **5.2 The Brief Symptom Interview**

Mental health was measured independently for the female participants and Israeli norms using the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI). The Israeli norm BSI results

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26 The original expanded version of ENRICH includes 10 items that ask about the respondent's satisfaction with various personality characteristics and behaviour of the partner (e.g. way of talking, moodiness, anger, smoking or drinking, etc.). The original short version of ENRICH (Fowers & Olson, 1993) includes one item, "I am very satisfied with my spouse's personal characteristics and behaviour," with a response categories ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Finally, the modified version used in the present study, the I-MQS, the item and response categories were changed but the meaning of the items were retained.

are based on data from Gilbar and Ben-Zur (2002) and the statistical t-test was then used to observe if there were any observed differences in mental health scores between the two groups. The order of the components is listed below in Table 4 and is placed in value order of mean scores for the Israeli Jewish & Arab couples.

**Table 4.** Brief Symptom Inventory comparisons between study sample and Israeli norms

Mental Health Components	GROUP 1 Women in Cross-frontier relationships Sample (N = 29)		GROUP 2 Israeli Norms (Jewish women partnered with Jewish men) (N = 262)**		T-test results
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Anxiety	2.47	0.79	1.87	0.67	<i>t</i> (df = 289) 4.49**
Hostility	2.36	0.92	1.69	0.69	4.79**
Somatisation	2.32	1.30	1.67	0.66	4.45**
Psychoticism	2.27	0.89	1.58	0.60	5.56**
Paranoid ideation	2.26	0.77	1.89	0.75	2.51*
General Severity Index	2.23	0.71	1.74	0.56	4.35**
Phobic anxiety	2.22	0.88	1.49	0.58	6.06**
Depression	2.13	0.85	1.72	0.66	3.08**
Compulsive	2.09	0.67	1.98	0.79	0.72
Interpersonal sensitivity	1.94	0.78	1.73	0.69	1.54

Note: Israeli norms are based on data from Gilbar and Ben-Zur (2002).

\*  $p < 0.05$ .

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

The women in this study depicted more instances of anxiety, hostility, somatisation, psychoticism, General Severity Index (GSI)<sup>27</sup>, phobic anxiety and depression than the Israeli norms (99% confidence), and paranoid ideation; the results make it very clear that mental problems are a very prominent feature for the women in this study. On almost all measures they performed poorly compared to the Israeli norm control group. Although most of the results on this measure are reported with a 99% confidence level (as opposed to 95% on the I-MQS), they should still be treated with caution due to the caveat regarding the study's small sample size.

In summary, results from the BSI indicate that the study's women suffer significantly more symptoms in all psychological dimensions, with the exception of

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<sup>27</sup> The Global Severity Index is designed to measure overall psychological distress

obsessive-compulsive and interpersonal sensitivity than Israeli norms. However, the I-MQS results reveal that they are happier with their spouses' characteristics than their counterparts in Israeli Jewish-Jewish and Arab-Arab couple relationships. They report better emotional communication, and, in general, score higher in perceived relationship quality.

## 6 Qualitative Results

The interview transcripts depicted several themes, which included the following:

- Problematic childhood background.
- Conversion to Islam and issues of Jewish identity.
- Various motivations for entering and engaging in these relationships.
- Antagonism from outsiders and other relationship costs.
- Coping with adversity, difficulties, and challenges.
- Positive growth as a result from the relationships.

### 6.1 Turbulent childhood background

A common characteristic for many of the women surveyed (26) is that they had a turbulent, disorganised, emotionally distressed and disturbed youth. In many cases they reported that the unhappiness they felt in childhood and adolescence was caused by parental marriages which ended up in divorce, nearly broke up, or one which was described as abusive and so being a major trauma in their lives. Table 5 below depicts their childhood and other significant relationship experiences.

**Table 5.** Reported family experiences in family of origin home

Family experiences	Frequency and percentage of occurrence
Parents divorced	3 (10%)
Turbulence in parental home	4 (10%)
One of their parents died before age of 16	4 (14%)
Parental absence (physically and/or mentally without parents)	7 (24%)
Reported problematic relationship with father-figure	7 (24%)
Broken relationship with sibling/ 'on & off'	3 (10%)
Running away from home	4 (14%)

\*\* Note: In some cases the women reported several experiences of trauma and were categorised into multiple categories accordingly.

Hence, most of the women reported a disturbing childhood rather than a rewarding one. In general, most of the participants drew an unhappy picture of some aspect from their childhood. As for family experiences in their childhood and adolescence, 10 (35%) stated that their parents were divorced during their childhood, four (14%) said they had at least one parent who died before they were 16 years of age. Growing up without the physical or mental aspect of parental presence or a problematic relationship with the father figure were the most frequently reported traumas (24% of the women respectively). Although the divorce rate stated may not be very high compared to the norm in most Western societies, it may be higher than Israeli Jews and Arab Muslims. No other comparisons pertaining to the other categories depicted in Table 5 were carried out between the present study's sample group and others living in Israel as no such information is readily available. Furthermore, the degree of 'troublesness' or the level of relationship distress may vary greatly.

## **6.2 Family background case study I**

The following case study exemplifies Jasmine's childhood background (one woman participant who did not convert to Islam):

Jasmine (32 years old) reported having to grow up fast in her family of origin. She frequently had to separate her parents, as physical and verbal abuse was prevalent. She remembered having to call the police often to help separate them. By the time Jasmine had to go enlist in the army her parents started to process a divorce. Serving in the army was a good respite for her as it provided her a place away from the domestic troubles.

Jasmine's father was often away, rarely at home. He helped minimally, assuming little economic responsibility. Her mother had to work long hours that caused a real problem for her because her mother had little time for her. Jasmine described her mother as an organized person.

*She would assign a lot, she had a lot to do, and she was working quite hard. I think she also tended to do this to avoid conflicts with my father and, of course, to help support us. She was*

*working quite hard so her time was very much taken up, she assigned a lot to do, organized us to do things.*

Jasmine described her as being 'strict.' She was somehow afraid of her mother and felt that if she wouldn't do what was expected she would react in a 'violent' way, saying 'awful' things that would hurt her. For example:

*You knew what the rules were, she would smack me, but it was more a symbolic smack, she was quite keen on discipline. When she got angry she would not hit us, she would just tell us what she thought, and it was emotional violence. She would say things as, I wish I hadn't had children; my life would be easier which deeply hurt me.*

Jasmine's relationship towards her mother was ambivalent. She was her central figure, the one who cared for her, but at the same time she felt that her mother did not accept her; she felt rejected and pressured to do things right. She perceived her mother as very strict and that her love was somehow conditional.

*Sometimes you felt that love was a bit conditional. You had to do the right thing, otherwise she would say horrible things, and even at times, threaten to have my father interfere ... she could be really cynical and really hurtful, if I did something wrong. Sometimes she'd come home and from work and say things as, my life would have been a lot better if I hadn't had you. That was so awful. I just run upstairs and cried. I mean I just didn't know what to do. At night I just cried, cried so much.*

However, Jasmine also reported that she felt frightened of what could have happened if her mother walked away. She knew she depended on her but wasn't certain if she could rely on her.

*My mother could be such a frightening person, more because I knew that I depended on her, 100% and what would happen if she went away and there would be nothing, just my horrible father and me.*

In general, we can say that Jasmine's relationship with her mother was ambivalent. She was the main figure, the one who cared for her, but at the same time Jasmine also felt rejected and pressured to do things right, felt that love was somehow conditional, and was also afraid of her.

#### 6.2.1 *Relationship towards the father*

Jasmine perceived her father as being troublesome, rejecting, neglecting, and as an absent figure. When asked to describe him she said she felt that she didn't know him that much because he was never around much and, when he was present, extreme tension and conflicts prevailed.

*With my father around it was always troublesome and I remember we had some really unhappy evenings. Honestly, I can remember that when he was around it was always chaotic and I had to mediate my between my parents, always keeping a careful eye that something wouldn't erupt or trigger a violent episode.*

She felt afraid of her father.

*When he got irritated it was quite, quite frightening, there was this time when, when, we went to see him at our grandparents house and, we were having dinner and he got angry about something and he kind of banged the table and broke a glass. And an argument developed and he approached my mother and hit her. I was frightened.*

Jasmine described her father as 'detached.' In a way she considered her father to be a stranger.

*He never really seemed to be at the centre of things, he was out there somewhere and in the most literal way he wasn't attached through the rest of the family, I mean he walked off a lot at nights and would return several days later. And then he would start smacking my mother, or yelling at her or us. And I would have to separate them.*

She felt rejected because her father left them.

*With my father I felt rejected. He just walked off a lot. It seemed that I didn't have any right whatsoever to be there. Basically, you know, what on earth have I done to deserve having my father?*

In general, Jasmine perceived her father as a violent and absent figure that abandoned them and caused a lot of pain and trouble. She felt that all these early experiences had a bad influence on her and made her become an insecure person who is afraid of being rejected if she fails to do the expected things right. She went on to say, “in terms of self-confidence my childhood experiences didn't provide a very good background for feeling sure of myself.” In the interview she also added that she wanted her children to feel loved all the time, to know that they are loved and accepted for what they are so they can feel secure of themselves and establish happy relationships. She did not want them to suffer like she suffered.

### **6.3 Family background synopsis II**

Yael [Haifa] reported a strenuous relationship within her family whilst growing up, namely with her father. Yael felt that her father never provided her with emotional support.

*Wow, that's [her relationship with her family] a very very long story itself. My mother was supportive, my father was not. He always put me down.*

Yael felt rejected by her father especially because she reported being treated differently than her siblings. Yael saw her father as rough, crude and ill mannered.

*I was insulted by him. I don't know ... I was never good enough. I was the girl, my brother the favoured one. I felt invisible.*

Yael said she felt she missed out on fathering because her father was emotionally absent. She then mentioned that her current relations with him were cut off.



*I just have, you know, to update that I am not speaking to my father today. Uh, my mother passed away and after my mother passed away, and again this goes into another story uhm ... I say, it's because of another whole other story, another entire story.*

Yael seemed to initially repress negative childhood memories. However, she later acknowledged and painfully recalled that she was physically abused.

*And, he would sometimes hit me when my mother was away. But, I was never furious because I would also feel ashamed about the hate and frustrations I would feel towards him. Because he was different, different when my mother was there. ... I don't know.*

Hence, Yael received confusing and contradictory messages from her father.

*When we were together, my parents and I, my father would smile at me and and, while my mother was alive we had contact. But today I am not talking to him. It has been four years; three or four years that we are not in touch, since my mother passed away, g-d bless her memory. I cut off any relations with him. We are not in touch and I am very very happy about this.*

Overall, Yael's relationship with her father can be characterised as a rejecting one. Her negative experiences at home left her with a feeling of insecurity.

*I remember never feeling good about myself. Never feeling that ... I had this big hole inside my stomach; somehow, it wasn't actually filled, because my relationship with my parents, especially my father, was very complicated ... today I am not in touch with him.*

#### **6.4 Converts and non-converts to Islam**

Fifteen of the study's subjects converted to Islam, while 14 of them chose to retain their Jewish identity and not convert to Islam. Differences between converts and non-converts to Islam emerged from the interview transcripts. For instance, many of the

non-converts to Islam reported having experiences with other partners before entering relationships with their Arab partners, and, in some cases, the women were previously married. They were generally older than the women who converted to Islam when they entered these relationships. In contrast, for those women who converted to Islam, their current relationship was their first serious relationship with a man.

## **6.5 Those who did not convert to Islam**

About half of the women (14/29) in the study, namely the women who did not convert to Islam, stopped short of crossing over to other side, maintaining their Jewish identity.

*I am not religious but, I was born with a particular religion, why do I, I have to convert? On the contrary, I wasn't convinced ... Why should a woman convert to Islam? I am not going to do convert to the Muslim religion; it's only to, to prove that I moved to the other side. So I don't need ... I didn't move to the other side. I stopped short of. There is a border ... No, no I am Jewish in every aspect and I come from a traditional family and I still have certain points that stayed with me from my education and upbringing and this [Effy, Netanya].*

These women generally lived within the Jewish sector, or a Jewish neighbourhood in a mixed city (e.g. Haifa, Netanya), and a certain degree of assimilation and conformity from their Arab partner was necessary.

*You always have to choose between the Arab sector and the Jewish Sector. And ... we are here, a Jewish city. We know the sector very well and cope with everything the sector gives... [Effy, Netanya].*

Thirteen of the women who did not convert to Islam did not have proficiency in Arabic. They conversed with their partners in Hebrew, another element related to their Israeli Jewish identity regardless of their relationship involvement. In a remarkable and exceptional case was Jasmine [living in an Arab village] who kept her Israeli Jewish identity and did not marry even after having established herself in her partner's village.

*I mean I never converted to become Muslim; he never converted to be Jewish. In this way it is possible, really it is. Look, I live in the village, living my own way. Yes, so it is true that I am not happy; it is not really my environment [Jasmine, living in an Arab village<sup>28</sup>].*

These women insisted on not converting to Islam and found ways of marrying their partner even though marriage to a non-Jew is not permitted by law in Israel.

*We got married there, in a regular civil marriage. You know, because it's illegal to get married here, so we didn't have an official ceremony here [Vanessa, Kibbutz].*

Consequently, 10 of them married abroad, mostly in Cyprus, a favourite spot for marriages among Israelis who wish to avoid the strict requirements of Israeli law; marriages across religious lines are prohibited by law in Israel.

*We went to Cyprus and got married there. We went for three days; it was all organised ahead ... The truth is- it is better than a religious wedding in Israel, better than a Jewish wedding [Smadar, Haifa].*

Four of the women who did not convert to Islam did not marry:

*I didn't get married because of my past. I don't like structure, not even a civilian marriage. I live with him because I know that I love him and for me this is the real thing [Jasmine, living in an Arab village].*

For some of these women, their current relationship, be it marriage or cohabitation, was not their first serious relationship. Three were previously married before they met their Arab partner so their relationship with their Arab partner was their

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<sup>28</sup> Specific names of Arabic villages are not provided in order to maintain anonymity. Those that converted to Islam will be cited as follows: (their pseudo-names, and Jewish city/Arab village/mixed city).

second intimate long-term cohabitation or married relationship. Some of them then went on to make it clear that those previous relationships were far from ideal:

*My ex husband was not ok; he was a drug addict, even though he was Jewish. He was a good guy, he had a pure heart but he had his problems. This is why we decided to separate, we got divorced. Of course there is great difference between Amir and him, but it is not something I can clearly point at, I am not going to speak bad about him- he was a good and nice man. Amir is totally different, a lot more relaxed, more down to earth, loyal to his home and family, he is responsible as a parent and a partner. This is the most significant difference... [Smadar, Haifa].*

*I was married to a Jewish Israeli and uh and would say, probably we married for a short time, almost three years, and by chance I met him [Arab partner] and that uh, about a year after I divorced. But even before I was even married I met and dated Arab men and my partner today is not the only Arab man that I dated ... The fact that I had a relationship [with a Jewish man] before I get started uh my relationship with my [Arab] partner, was a good relationship in the way, the fact that we liked, we liked uh, uh, liked to go to different places ... So it was really culture and he had children and that I really got along with so that was nice. But I didn't like him. I liked the children, I liked the culture what he brought into it in that area, but I didn't like living with him and I didn't love him and I couldn't stand him [Yael, Haifa].*

The women's past relationship experiences affected the way in which they perceived and interpreted their present relationship.

*That all the relationships I had before him were relationships of somebody that you can't get. Or it was a problematic partner or it was someone that was already married or ... there were a lot of relationships that were from some place painful. You know, that they didn't really work out [Sivan, Tel Aviv].*

Atypically, one woman was younger than 20 years old when she met her partner. Generally, the women who did not convert to Islam were considerably older than those women who converted to Islam.

*We weren't 18, 19 years old when we decided to marry. We were much older. We had a lot of experience already. I think it would have been difficult if we were younger. Age is an important factor [Liora, Haifa].*

*After my x husband, when he met me I was, about 37 years old and he was also about the same age ... Look, I think that eh maybe at a very early age to do this is maybe a little more difficult than to do this at an older age ... I think it's easier when you are bit more eh older, when you're mature ... first of all you need a mature state of mind, a mature mental health to do this, to understand that eh, that you don't live with the social group, you live with the person [Galia, Haifa].*

While most of the non-converts to Islam were of Ashkenazi descent, and had a traditional religious upbringing, two women were of Sephardic origin. In fact, one of the Sephardic women talked about a 'strength' that she and her partner shared:

*I'm from a Moroccan family ... Our families are very similar ... she is an Oriental character ... the mother is a house wife, the father is the dominant, the controlling one, also in money matters, also regarding decisions, in this sense, it was sometimes amazing the extent we came from similar families ... it is very worthwhile that partners are from similar families, in their patterns, because only like this it works out. I think, because if one of us was from the 'high society' and one from ... oriental ... typical ... it's difficult to understand each other and there is in some sense, in my opinion, shame, but there was no shame between us in the sense that ... we come from families ... with a very similar family patterns, that much that the last time I remember seeing his father's photos, I told him 'wow! He is similar to my father'. I saw the similarity to my father, my*

*father's behaviour. Now, because of these family patterns, they we came from, it is not difficult for us ... It's not different, because I'm eastern (oriental), but if I were Polish, from a proper Polish home, so it would be difficult for me, because I wouldn't be able to accept it, but because I come from the same material and the same patterns ... familial even, so it's not difficult for me. It's not difficult for us ... it's also not difficult for me to understand him. It's easy for us to talk about our parents without feeling stupid and ashamed. Because once I had ... I had friends ... I had once ... most of them were Ashkenazi. I was very ashamed to tell them that my father is a controlling person and...and my mother says 'yes, yes, yes' ... it was ... I was very ashamed of this, like ... what kind of parents do I have? But with him, I'm not ashamed to tell him this. He understands everything ... because he came from the same situation, so it's easy. That is not difficult [Liora, Haifa].*

Liora [Haifa] identified with her partner's family background which consisted of a domineering father and an 'Oriental' submissive mother. The women also reported some difficulties, such as a loss of identity and culture to pass on to their children.

*And I also thought he was more open than he was. I thought the children are Jewish and Muslim. But, from his point of view, the kids are simply Muslim with a Jewish mother. He thinks they are. For them, if the father is Muslim than they are Muslim [Karen, Jerusalem].*

## **6.6 Converts to Islam**

Fifteen of the women in this study made a radical lifestyle change mediated through their religious conversion to Islam. They adopted a religion or a worldview opposed to that of their parents and upbringing.

*We got married eh at the Sheikh's house, I converted to Islam, you know. And, we got married at the Sheikh's house [Adi, Jaffa].*

*I learnt their Qur'an. I learnt everything [Tali, Jaffa].*

The women gave up their own way of life in order to live with their partner in an Arab lifestyle. These women lived in Arab cities, villages or neighbourhoods of a mixed town (e.g. Jaffa), hence assimilating into Arab society. Accordingly, all of the women who converted to Islam have a proficiency in both Arabic and Hebrew. Most of the women converts grew up in mixed neighbourhoods or had some exposure to Arab culture and/or mentality growing up due to their ethnic Sephardic background.

*We lived among Arabs ... So it was like this, I already spoke Arabic, and also eh I knew everything and I also knew their cooking [Daniella, living in an Arab Village].*

Nine of the women who grew up in a religious and/or traditional household converted to Islam:

*We were very religious. Very religious [Tali, Jaffa].*

Those who converted highlighted the respect they received within the Arab community.

*With the Arabs it is... its good, like its, its flattering when a Jewish woman, comes to lives with a Muslim that gives up her religion and converts to Muslim. This, this is something good [Gavriella, Jaffa].*

*At the religion of Muslim there is a lot of respect to their woman, a lot, a lot of respect to the woman. With the Jews they also have respect but not like there is with the Muslims ... There is a lot a lot of respect for the woman [Tali, Jaffa].*

Sixteen out of the 29 women met their Arab partner before the age of 20. In fact, all the women who reside in Jaffa and that converted to Islam were younger than 19 years old when they met their partner, relatively younger than most of the other subjects in the present sample.

*Eh from age of 14 we started to go out. At the age of 16, yes, at the age of 16 I already married. Yes, I already had a boy [Shani, Jaffa].*

*I met him at the age 13 in Jaffa ... He was a handsome guy and a good guy and not a criminal and not demanding in sexual intercourse. He really wanted a girl to have fun with and to get to know and slowly, the relationship was built. A healthy relationship, not just a relationship that is 'use and throw away,' like it is said, no. It was built gradually and we felt like we complete each other [Naama, Jaffa].*

Four of the women ran away from home, itself a radical act implying rebellion.

*I met him when I was 13 ... I saw him and we met. We got to know each other and slowly we got closer ... when I was 16 my family found out and I ran away from home, to Jamil's [her husband's] home. And then it started ... The snowball got bigger and bigger, started rolling and rolling until till I turned 18 and finally left home ... I first ran away from home. Later the police brought me back and took me to my sister's place ... Yes, and the police brought me back. The second time, I also ran away [to her husband] and the police brought me back and then they kept me one year at home, locked at home, and didn't allow me to go out. They didn't let me leave the house ... And the third time, two days before my 18th birthday, I left home and that's it. And since then we don't speak [Naama, Jaffa].*

The women not only entered these Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships but also made a radical shift in their religious outlook and daily way of life. The women articulated that they converted to Islam for the sake of their children and family and so reared their children in a Muslim way. The women reflected this responsibility in their accounts.

*Look, I will explain to you, I converted to Muslim I raise them in one religion, I don't mix religions with them, I don't confuse*



*them ... They learn about the Muslim Religion eh and that's all. I try not, not to confuse them. Really, no ... in principle, eh the Muslim holidays everything eh everything every thing, everything. All the tradition, customs, all, we go according to eh the Muslim tradition [Sara, Jaffa].*

Hence, the 'sake of the children and family' became the foundation for keeping their family together and coping with any loss.

*So, something is replacing something. I have a home, a good home, and children, and a good husband. Thank g-d. One that ... it's not that this it replacing the other, but more or less [Naama, Jaffa].*

For them, entering their relationship was ultimate. They went on to say that there was no going back to where they came from.

*That was my decision, and how I did the decision, that's it. You can't say anything else. You can't do, play with the religion. I don't accept this. And that's it. I can't go back, there is no way back. I already made the decision already and that's it [Tali, Jaffa].*

*It's not like I regret marrying an Arab or something like this. Never for a second do I regret but eh, it could have also been different [laugh]. Yes, less stress. It could be ... What would I know? I don't know. I don't know. I never regret that I have, of my husband. There isn't time to look at the past. It's forbidden to look at your past [Daniella, living in an Arab village].*

#### **6.6.1 Case study of a convert to Islam**

Daniella described her family home as being a religious one and where she also had contact with, and exposure to, Israeli Arabs. Her mother died when she was thirteen years old leaving her responsible for taking care of, and raising, her younger siblings while her father worked.

Daniella met her husband before the age of 18 and eventually married him and converted to Islam. She then went to live in his Arab village, adapting to his Arab way of life and consequently following Arab Islamic rituals. She wears the traditional dress that Muslim women wear, covers her hair when she is in public, speaks Arabic, and assumes responsibility for domestic duties. For Daniella, praying in an Islamic way is one means for coping with the ambiguities of her feelings. She asserts that she is content with her life yet vehemently believes that everyone should marry within his/her religion.

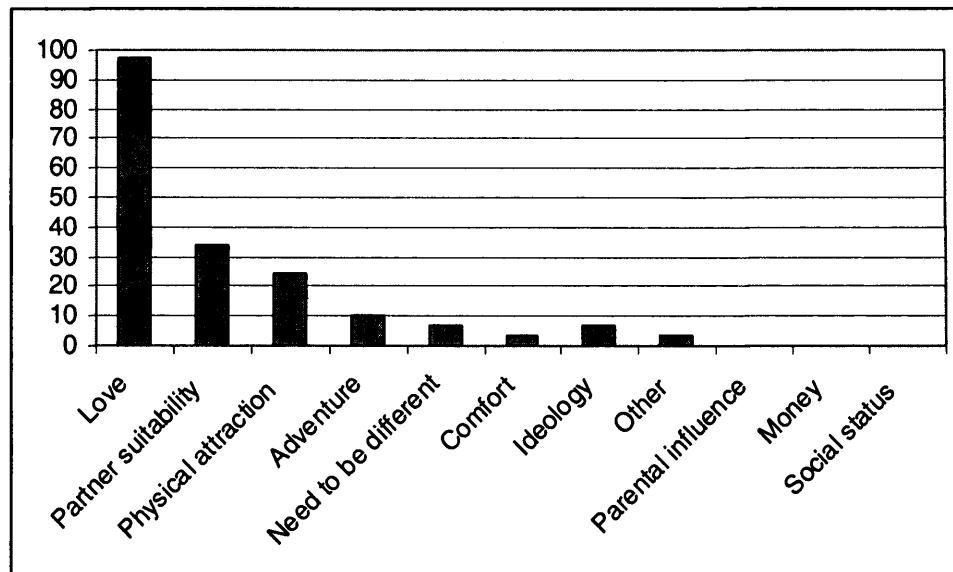
*Love is a very very difficult thing, like it overrides a lot of things, even a community. But how can I tell the heart, to the head, to my mind that ... to look after, between the mind and the heart, you know? ... I have, I have fights between my mind and my heart. Nu, so what, it's good? So why, why should everyone have this? ... its not that its bad for me, g-d forbid,... here, they are crazy about me. They love me, and and there isn't, I am not missing anything. I am respected [Daniella, living in an Arab village].*

Daniella affirms that she doesn't have any contact with her family except for one of her younger brothers. However, she stopped visiting him as her meetings with him caused her too many conflicting feelings, 'fights between her heart and mind.' She goes on to say that she has strength to continue living the way she does for the sake of her children and to keep her family together.

## **6.7 Motives for marrying**

Informants were also asked on the questionnaires as to what extent a list of possible motives were of relevance to them (very great, great, little or no relevance) for entering their relationship. They were provided with a list of possible motives and the frequency of their motive responses is depicted in the frequency bar graph, Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1.** The frequency bar graph illustrates women's motives for entering Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships



As depicted in the frequency bar graph, the motives with the highest percentage of interviewee responses were *love* 97%, *partner suitability* 34%, *physical attraction* 24%, *adventure* 10%, the *need to be different* 6.9%, *ideology* 6.9%, *comfort* 3.4%, and *other* 3.4%. Other motivations that surfaced during the qualitative interviews were: in search of family substitute and rebelliousness.

The interviewees were also asked in the interviews why they entered their relationships. Love was often described as being the principle grounds for marriage and is a valid motive. Twenty-eight of the respondents in the present study emphasised love as being the main marital motive and decisive factor for entering their relationships.

*And like, he loved me from first sight. Like, he saw me and that was it ... Like, we felt some chemistry but with all this chemistry I couldn't bear that I would marry someone outside my community. I tried to escape from this a lot but obviously I was extremely caught up in this [laugh]. Love is a very very difficult thing like it overrides a lot of things even a community ... love, loyalty ... Love adds a lot ... It was love at first sight, I tried to resist but couldn't ... Love overcame everything...I love my husband... [Dana, Jaffa].*

Hence, love played a decisive and central role in many of the women's lives and resonates in all of the study's narratives:

*That's all, the destiny; love* [Moria, living in Arab village].

According to their accounts they simply fell in love with someone who just happened to be an Arab. Seven of the women also talked about physical attraction as being a significant factor for their partner choice.

*I had a click with him. He's cute ... something primal* [Libi, Tel Aviv].

*His appearance is what especially attracted me [to him]. He is good looking, my husband is good looking. What can you do? That's it. I have, I have the pictures that I will show you.* [Daniella, living in an Arab Village].

*First of all, he looked good; he was a handsome man* [Dana, Jaffa].

As mentioned previously, most of the women (26) encountered troubled childhoods before they met their husband.

*I met him at the age of 18. I suffered for 18 years until I met husband* [Sara, living in an Arab village].

Their oppressive childhoods weighed heavily on them such that they may have been motivated to choose their partner in search of a family substitute.

*And I was always looking for a home, for warmness, for the feeling of being loved without having to act as someone else ... the relations at home were not good ... especially my relationship with my father. My father and I are kind of symbiotic, we can't do one without the other, but we can't do together either ... I was going around for years ... this empty feeling inside of me... it was always there. And when I found Oziz, it was ... Oziz was just wrapping me, that is, he just accepted me without asking any questions, without telling me*

*how I should be; he loves me in an undemanding way... [Chaya, Afula].*

One woman seemed to describe her father-in-law in such a way that he resembled a father-like substitute:

*The father, his father he was the most favourable. In the beginning he didn't agree but when he saw me he agreed. He stood by me until he passed away. He used to watch over me. He was ... what a great man! Even when I had difficulties I thought about him [and thought] its okay I have to go on to show him [father-in-law] that, that he was right. You understand? That he was right that I was with eh his son. Just because of him. There were a lot of troubles; there were ... a lot of troubles. Problems and all this ... A king. He loves me more ... he loves me more than the ... the ... more than the entire family, how much I was... and ... It's the truth ... He believed in me. You understand? He believed in me. That's all ... I love his family, his mother, my husband's father... [Daniella, living in an Arab village].*

Others (four) seemed to suggest an ideological motive in their discourse.

*I think that it's about time that our fate here in Israel will change. Because we live together, live together. Really. How much can we fight against each other and how much ... Sometimes I want to convince people that Arabs don't eat people. Arabs are not evil, as much as you think. I notice all kinds of things like this ... I wish I could bring peace to this country [Dana, living in an Arab village].*

Other motivations were also expressed in the interviews such as rebellion, in search of adventure, and attention seeking.

*And, from the beginning ... really, eh, like an adventure. Like this. Adventure and I succeeded my mission. And that's it [Naama, Jaffa].*

*Because I enjoyed the looks ... So, it was just fun. I loved it. I always loved it. And, that's why I chose this marriage because I love those things [Vanessa, Kibbutz].*

## **6.8 Family and friends' reactions**

The women's narratives are enormously diverse so it may also be risky to generalise. However, what one person says may apply to many. All the women talked about hostile and inimical racist attitudes they experienced from their own family, their husband's family, and/or from the Israeli Jewish community. When they informed their families of their intentions, to be with or to marry an Arab man, there was an overwhelming sadness that affected most involved. Twenty-six of the women reported that their parents could not have imagined anything worse for their daughters than to marry an Arab man.

*My father was also very religious, very, my family was very religious. And it hurts him that I eh married a Muslim [Naama, Jaffa].*

*He [her father] won't speak to me. I miss him but there is nothing I could do. He is religious. It's a shame, it's sad, but there is nothing that could be done. That was his decision [Karen, Jerusalem].*

Twenty-three of the participants in this study repeatedly illustrated the point that their family of origin threatened to withdraw love, approval and assistance because of their relationship.

*I, I have a good relationship with my family eh but they have terms. They [her family] are not ready to see ... they don't accept him [her husband]. They accept me and the children ... Each year I get so angry [Effy, Netanya].*

*Oh. It was difficult. It was very difficult. It was very difficult. Very very. Eh, my parents didn't accept that I got married, didn't accept, didn't talk to me. From the moment they learnt*

*that I married they didn't talk, they didn't accept. No. they don't even accept it today [Tali, Jaffa].*

Blood ties are psychologically powerful for most people (Root, 2001), and so the reactions the women experienced from their families resulted in a raw source of pain and anger. The list of negative experiences that these women encountered is extremely long, covering every area of life, and for many it is still being experienced. Nine women reported that both sets of parents found the situation difficult to accept and for some they were ultimately thrown out of their parental home, being forced to choose between their blood family and future husband.

*... and I told him, 'get out of here, if you don't want to be with me, so get out of here. I already destroyed everything, so I have nowhere to go back to now ... he also decided that that's it and he moved here, he left his parents, like ... he got divorced from his parents and that's all and from that moment we started the difficult life, like the difficult life we had already before but eh.... We started life together. Yes, we wanted to be together and the parents do not interest us. We are willing to give up our parents [Liora, Haifa].*

*His parents didn't take it so well, and with my parents we cut off ties. It is 27 years with no ties [Sara, living in an Arab Village].*

The women were affected by both expected and unexpected responses from their respective families and tried to wear a rather dismissive attitude about doing so. Many of the women felt unstable and with no feeling of permanence in a very powerfully personal way.

#### **6.8.1      *The first years of marriage***

The interview material revealed that for 12 of the women, after some time into their marriages, the children served as a catalyst to reunite the family.

*What happens is that I lost contact with my mother for five years and over a year ago my sister brought Omer (older son) to my mother. My mother was over-whelmed when she saw him that ...*

*and we got back in touch with each other. The past few months were sooo ... returned to what it used to be five years ago. As if the five years with no contact did not happen [Karen, Jerusalem].*

The birth of children sometimes broke down the family's resistance and helped to legitimise the marriage in their family's eyes; some family members who were initially antagonistic eventually came round to re-building a relationship with their children. However, 10 of the women reported that there still was some emotional pain, although their relationship with their family of origin was in some sense healed.

*So, my parents accepted us so to say, but didn't accept us because ... my father comes here often, to the North and he never comes to visit me. He also comes to see Ofir [the baby]. He was here a week ago. He didn't come to me and it is painful for me. It hurts me and also what my mother does ... that she doesn't tell and tries to deny my relationship to others... [Liora, Haifa].*

## **6.9 Coping**

### **6.9.1 Politics**

One way of coping was to discuss politics openly with their partner. Political disagreements between the Arab-Jewish demarcations were openly discussed and were a natural topic for discussion for all of the non-converts.

*I am telling you that sometimes we can be in some political disagreements but it's not very drastic ... Now, there are many things that I don't know about the Arab world, about Palestinians, and he explains to me and I was convinced. It's ok. If I don't get convinced, and I get more convinced by the newspaper and TV so it's OK. So there is a fight but this fight doesn't, in this life, end in an argument. It doesn't finish in an argument, it finishes in that or he gets convinced or I get convinced or both of us stay with our own opinions in the*



*specific subject within the big subjects and its eh completely legitimate* [Galia, Haifa].

Living with their Arab partner and discussing various political issues with them, gave them an enhanced perspective of the political situation and so their primary concern was to communicate this in their narratives. The women who converted to Islam, however, were not as expressive and comfortable discussing politics with their partner.

*It's better for you to sit quietly* [Sara, living in an Arab village].

*No, no. No, no. No, look, we don't speak about it but eh. How do you say it, with the Muslim religion, more eh, more eh, they like to keep silent more than to talk about it. Because If you talk about eh it its not eh good for a human being so it's better to not speak about it at all. That's all* [Tali, Jaffa].

For them, an idea of a common and/or similar 'united' front was played out extensively in regards to ideas of political thought. All the women in the study, however, reported being able to identify with both Jewish and Arab perspectives concerning the political situation.

#### 6.9.2 *Minimising*

All of the women continuously used minimising phrases. In this manner, they minimised Jewish-Arab differences such that any demarcation became negligible; they did see their relationships/marriages as distinct from ones where partners came from the same background.

*When I look at Jihad [her husband] I see a human being and not Jewish or Arabic, I don't see Jew or Muslim or ...* [Effy, Netanya].

*A human being should be accepted because he is a human being* [Belinda, Haifa].

The women talked about the illusions others have about their relationships and the ordinariness of their life together, 'just like any other couple.'

*We are all human beings, we all want the same things and it has nothing to do with religion. To have fun and to be happy together has nothing to do with religion or anything else [Smadar, Haifa].*

They downplayed certain differences between Arabs and Jews and their couple relationships for the good of themselves. When they were confronted to examine their own relationships they rationalised and stressed that problems occurred in all relationships, not mixed and mixed relationships alike.

*... you need to work very hard to ... to hold any marriage. I uh I uh I don't believe that I don't understand why mixed marriage should be so much more difficult [Liat, Jerusalem].*

*When, when we argue than I don't want anything at all. But when we love each other I don't want to give him up. It's like this with all couples [Gavriella, Jaffa].*

They vigorously stated that there was a lack of difficulties or differences, and rationalising about this might be a way to avoid discussing any uncomfortable areas of their relationship.

## **6.10 Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships as a potential for growth**

### **6.10.1 Relationship rewards: a route for personal development**

The costs of being in these relationships were high for the women in the study. Twenty-three of the women reported little or no support from their families of origin. Their struggles led them to stand firm in their resolve to be together creating the defensive armour they learned to wear, strengthening their relationship.

*I felt closer with Asif [her husband] because of these [negative] reactions. As if, he was my family [Liat, Jerusalem].*

Many of the relationship 'costs' provided them with the dedication necessary to keep their relationships durable over time. The women were also positive in their accounts. All of the women poignantly emphasised the opportunities, the enhanced

learning, the personal self-growth and development of being they experienced because of their involvement in their relationships.

*Each day is a challenge; I must prove to myself my strength. I chose the more difficult path. I learn a lot about myself all the time. I test myself to the limits. My children teach me a lot [Effy, Netanya].*

Furthermore, their personalities were also a significant factor that may have led them to enter their relationships.

*Because, I love the how, uh how much variety there is here, how interesting it is here, the challenge, I live those experiences. I get bored when I hang out with people that are just like me. I don't like standard things. Standard things are ok, there are standard things. I, I need unique things otherwise its boring for me [Vanessa, Kibbutz].*

The women's relationship also gave them an opportunity for re-organisation and re-affirmation of their self. The women's decision to be in these relationships consolidated their sense of self thereby granting them emotional independence and assertiveness from their family of origin. By finding a partner outside of their own community the women obtained a more definite identity, while also holding the promise of potential resolution of personal problems.

*I have come to terms with myself. This point with my parents was very difficult. I came to terms with the situation, accepted it, and that's it. It's my life and what I want, and someone that doesn't want ... [Liora, Haifa].*

## **7 Discussion: An Overview of the Literature**

This study examined in detail the experiences of Israeli Jewish women involved in a cross-cultural relationship with Israeli Arab men and is intended as a point of reference for further psychological studies on Jewish & Arab couples in Israel.

This section provides an overview of the current study's findings in light of the literature pertaining to cross-frontier relationships. Such an undertaking immediately prompts the question: what is a cross-frontier relationship? It could be argued that couples can never be regarded as cross-cultural, as each couple forms its own personal 'mini-culture,' regardless of from where the partners come. Alternatively, it has been suggested that men and women each have gender-specific cultures (Maltz & Borker, 1982; Tannen, 1986, 1990), and in light of this, each and every heterosexual couple engages in a cross-cultural relationship. Thus, the scale of the definitional problem of 'cross-cultural' can even indicate a cultural divide between the sexes within the same class and culture. In a similar manner, this can also be true for varying extents of different classes or even regions within the same society (Breger & Hill, 1998). Consequently, all marriages could be said to be cross-cultural in some way. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the author will engage with neither of these definitional extremes. Rather, this section will focus on only one type of relationship, namely romantic and sexual couple relationships in life-long monogamous marriages where the partners come from different linguistic, religious, ethnic or national backgrounds. In particular, the study investigated Israeli Jewish & Arab couple relationships who are distinct from other 'mixed' couple research found in the literature (e.g. Ata, 2000; Breger & Hill, 1998; Sollors, 2000; Stoltzfus, 1996). For these couples the political milieu in Israel creates a different context and added burden, which is non-existent for most mixed couples elsewhere in the world.

Essentially, a country's political context should be taken into account when defining who is considered an insider and who is considered an outsider, the influences on marriage patterns between different groups and the levels of social acceptance or rejection of intercultural marriages (Breger & Hill, 1998). It has been said that there is a political significance for each of the religious, ethnic, and cultural groups involved in intercultural marriages, especially in times of hostility. Rouhana (1997) examined the changing identity of Palestinian citizens in Israel and argued that in times of conflict,

this group's ethno-national identity became significant and a central part of their individual identity. This, in turn, can further increase the social distance between cultural groups and decrease the number of intermarriages. When intermarriage occurs, political strain of the country and the tension between Arab and Jewish cultural groups potentially leads to the dissolution of these pairs and their families. In line with this were the findings in Muller's (1987) study of Arab-French intermarriages, and Abady's (1991) study on Jewish-Arab intermarriages, where they found that parents and children of such unions often fall victim to a system of hostile bureaucratic procedures. The women in the present study were also affected by the existing Arab-Jew conflict. The present study took into consideration the effects of social forces, in particular the political matrix of the Arab-Jewish conflict, on women's adaptation in their relationships. Marked antagonism has historically existed, and continues to exist between Arabs and Jews in Israel, separating the two groups.

The general attitude towards Israeli Jewish & Arab couples is that they are socially unacceptable, as seen in Abu-Rayya's (2000) research on intermarriage between Arabs and Jews in Israel. In his study, he also observed that Arab-Jewish couples employed one of four coping mechanisms to handle the effect of the political conflict on their families: (a) identification with the oppressed, (b) greater unity as a couple, (c) avoidance of accusation, and (d) political amnesia (ignoring anything that has to do with politics). These coping mechanisms observed are consistent with some of the findings in the current study where some women reported that difficulties encountered strengthened their relationship.

*From the beginning we held each other tightly and they saw that there is a wall around, no. And that it's impossible to break it from inside and to knock us down or something. No. we are strong together [Naama, Jaffa].*

In the present study, the women who converted to Islam generally reported a degree of 'political amnesia' where they refrained from discussing political situations with their spouses. The women who did not convert to Islam, however, actively engaged in political discussions and occasionally had disagreements with their partners. Interestingly, they contended that this failed to create additional tension in their relationships. Nonetheless, all the women in the present study asserted that their

relationships opened up a new perspective and means of understanding the Jewish-Arab conflict in Israel. Their relationships allowed them to identify with both Arab and Jewish perspectives pertaining to the political situation in Israel.

On a similar note are the findings of Donnan (1990), who compared attitudes toward interfaith marriages in Northern Ireland and Pakistan and pointed out that interfaith marriage represents a threat for cultural and religious groups in societies that face difficult political conflicts. Consequently, they are regarded with hostility. Hence, the power relationships existing between different groups in a society have several ramifications for those concerned. They not only influence the attitudes of individuals toward intermarriage and the relationship between those involved in the intermarriage, but also governmental actions. For example, in order to safeguard Israel's Jewish majority, a subtle yet pervasive discouragement of intermarriage occurs at a government level. Jews and non-Jews cannot legally marry in Israel and since in Israel civil marriage and non-Orthodox religious marriage are not legally recognised, the sole option remaining to these couples is to wed overseas. On a similar note regarding governmental action, Breger (1998) studied intercultural marriages in Germany and found that the state restricted the foreign spouse's entry into the country or placed restrictions on obtaining visa or work permits. She also found that the state may even refuse to allow intercultural couples to marry. In this way the state, by the power of its authority, contributed to and legitimised negative discourse about and negative actions toward foreigners and intercultural marriages (Breger, 1998).

### **7.1 Perception of Jewish intermarriage**

The interview data regarding the women's general negative experiences of outsiders' reactions towards their relationships is consistent with past sentiment regarding Jewish intermarriage. Historically the Jewish people have experienced persecution and presently the number of Jews in the world is low. There are about 13 million Jews worldwide (primarily living in Israel and the United States), which is less than ¼ of 1% of the world's population (Marqusee, 2005). Consequently, Jews are sensitive to the influence of outside religions, especially when that influence threatens Jewish survival. In the past, Jewish intermarriage has been rare.

For the most part, community and family responses towards Israeli Jewish & Arab couples in Israel resemble past sentiments towards mixed couples in America. For example, Jewish parents frequently sat Shiva<sup>29</sup> for children who intermarried and this is reflected in four of the women's accounts in the present study:

*My father, in the beginning, eh, said he will mourn for me. That he is not willing to see me at all, he would sit Shiva [Naama, Jaffa].*

However, the interview material diverges with the changing sentiment towards Jewish intermarriage, especially in the USA. According to the Jewish Conservative Movement's Joint Commission (USA), in a press release concerned about the response to intermarriage:

*In the past, intermarriage ... was viewed as an act of rebellion, a rejection of Judaism. Jews who intermarried were essentially excommunicated. But now, intermarriage is often the result of living in an open society ... If our children end up marrying non-Jews, we should not reject them. We should continue to give our love and by that retain a measure of influence in their lives, Jewishly and otherwise. Life consists of constant growth and our adult children may yet reach a stage when Judaism has new meaning for them. However, the marriage between a Jew and non-Jew is not a celebration for the Jewish community. We therefore reach out to the couple with the hope that the non-Jewish partner will move closer to Judaism and ultimately choose to convert. Since we know that over 70 percent of children of intermarried couples are not being raised as Jews ... we want to encourage the Jewish partner to maintain his/her Jewish identity, and raise their children as Jews (Nadell, 1988).*

The Israeli context needs to be differentiated from that of the American one. Throughout its relatively short existence, Israeli society has been subject to large waves

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<sup>29</sup> A Jewish mourning ritual lasting seven days.

of immigration from a diverse array of countries. Consequently, neither Israeli Jewish nor Arab societies are homogenous; among the Arabs there are Muslims, Christians and Bedouins, while the Jews are separated into two extensive ethnic sectors: the Ashkenazim, and the Sephardim and Orientals. Since Israel's inception, its declared ideology has been to create a 'melting pot' through cultural and social integration (Peres, 1976), an assimilation of the two Jewish sectors. This approach, based on a Zionist vision and the 'in gathering of exiles,' intended to meet the needs of the new country. Within this context, marriage between ethnic groups has been considered one of the main roads leading to such integration (Peres & Schrift, 1978), as well as the main instrument for measuring integration (Bernstein & Antonovsky, 1981; Rosen, 1982; Kraus, 1984). To what extent assimilation and integration have been successful is debatable, as clearly a social and economic division between the two groups still exists (although to a lesser extent in recent years) and full integration between the different Jewish communities (e.g. Ashkenazim, Sephardim) is not complete yet.

It is interesting to note, though, that the absorption and integration of various Jewish ethnic groups is greatly encouraged and the state's internal government agency records regularly check the statistics of such marriages. However, the term 'integration' is almost never used when discussing Jewish-Arab relations. The terms closest to 'integration' that one comes across are 'co-existence' and 'co-operation', as in the case of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, a cooperative village situated equidistant from Jerusalem and Tel Aviv-Jaffa, consisting of Jews and Palestinian Arabs of Israeli citizenship living side by side in co-existence. The members living there demonstrate the possibility of coexistence, two statehoods of two consciously separate and distinct national entities, by developing a community based on mutual acceptance, respect and cooperation. Nevertheless, assimilation and intermarriage is not officially encouraged. Indeed, only a few advocate it, but only unofficially. Very few will go further and justify—let alone encourage— Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships. In theory, cross-frontier unions between Israeli Jews & Arabs might help to overcome the division between the two communities. Such unions may advance a political agenda, by advocating blending of two cultures and individuals in order to eliminate the cultural, political, and social differences amongst them. On the other hand, it might lead to added tension if it is seen as a threat to national integrity or if the identity of the offspring becomes a matter of controversy. Clearly, the actual effect of cross-frontier marriages



would depend largely upon the form they take, the motives and social status of the spouses, and the reactions of their close family.

Interfaith marriage is a subject matter continuously debated by Jews in the Diaspora<sup>30</sup>. Essentially, all branches of Orthodox Judaism, both Haredi and non-Haredi, regard intermarriage as wrong and refer to intermarriage as a 'Second Silent Holocaust.' Demographics indicate that approximately 50% of American Jews are marrying non-Jews<sup>31</sup> and only 33% of these dual-faith couples are raising their children as Jews. Therefore, intermarriage poses a serious threat to Jewish survival (Katz, 2006). Nonetheless, intermarriage between Israeli Arabs & Jews does not necessarily denote a survival issue. It is important to note that in the Israeli context the religious Jewish identity is not as salient as it is for Jewish individuals living outside of Israel. In a social survey conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics covering 2002-2004, 44% of Jewish Israelis aged 20 and over defined themselves as secular; 27% defined themselves as traditional; 12% as traditionally observant, 9% as Orthodox; and 8% ultra-Orthodox. Hence, the survey found a particularly high rate of secularism—63%—among native Israelis of European or North American origin, compared to 33% among native Israelis of Asian origin and 25% of native Israelis of African origin (Bassok, 2006).

The question that therefore arises is to what extent culture really determines what people do. For instance, women in Israel may call themselves Jewish but Judaism may have very little influence on their behaviour because of the Jewish religious vs. secular nationalistic Israeli identity divide in the population. For secular Israeli Jews, Judaism may have very little influence on their behaviour, as a national secular identity is the first and foremost means by which they define themselves. Hence, the Israeli Jewish-Arab problem is not necessarily a religious one, nor is it a self-preservation one, as it is outside of Israel. Instead, the Israeli Jewish-Arab problem and tension existing between the two groups involves politics and control of land. These couples symbolise

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<sup>30</sup> As explained earlier, the term 'Diaspora' refers to Jews living outside of Israel today.

<sup>31</sup> Further statistical details were not provided. Taken from [http://judaism.about.com/od/interfaithfamilies/a/intermarr\\_jew.html](http://judaism.about.com/od/interfaithfamilies/a/intermarr_jew.html)

both a conceptual and an emotional problem; ancient animosities continue to exist and interplay between Arabs and Jews in Israel. As previously highlighted, both the Arabs and the Israelis are trapped in their controversial past and present-day discord.

Spickard (1989) points out that with Jewish intermarriage outside of Israel it is much more common for the Christian spouse to convert to Judaism than the other way around. Parents of Jews who intermarried often pressured their sons-and daughters-in-law to become Jews either because of religious conviction or from a desire to maintain appearances. Some parents made conversion a condition for giving their permission to marry. Along with the increase in intermarriages in the United States throughout the 1960s, '70s and '80s, and the liberalised position some rabbis had with regard to intermarriage and conversion, there was a greater acceptance of unconverted spouses by Jewish groups. During this era, the amount of Gentile spouses converting to Judaism was higher than ever before. This could be attributed to a minority ethnic identity becoming acceptable—even desirable—to a majority of people for the first time in American history. However, even those who elected to maintain their Christian identity often found a sense of belonging within Judaism. In the USA, many began to feel that Jewish organisations should open communication with intermarried couples, embrace the Jewish partner's faith, and allow for, and support, the Gentile partner's participation in Jewish activities. Many synagogues began offering classes for non-Jewish partners to integrate them into Judaism and to teach them the fundamentals of Judaism. Eventually, not only Reform leaders, but also members of the more conservative traditions, expressed new sentiments:

*Programs have to be created for identifying mixed married families and for reaching out to them. Special attempts must be made to reach the children of mixed marriages with educational and cultural programming. The parents should also be involved as much as possible (and with sensitivity for the non-Jewish partner) in Jewish-content programming (Spickard, 1989, p. 227).*

They anticipated that some would convert but were ready to accept those who were only willing to support their spouse's Judaism. The number of mixed, unconverted couples was increasing and became common in Reform and Conservative synagogues.

Moreover, the general trend was for Gentile spouses to connect with their partner's Judaism:

*While conversion and intermarriages were both indicators of assimilation, intermarriage seldom caused Jews to convert to Christianity. The opposite was not true, however. Due to parental pressure or personal wish, Gentiles who married Jews frequently sought to become Jews themselves (Spickard, 1989, p. 223).*

However, these findings are not supported by the present study. Fifteen out of the 29 women participants converted to Islam with no instance of the Arab partner converting to Judaism. A possible reason for this is a religious one where Muslim men are permitted to marry Jewish or Christian women according to Islamic law (for a detailed discussion see '7.2 Gender patterns').

Essentially, Table 6 supports the claim that the increasing rate of intermarriage is a universal trend, a hallmark of the twentieth century, and an inherent element of globalisation. The world is getting smaller, people are more flexible, and there is more movement of people across the world, whether as tourists, professionals, academics, contract workers or permanent migrants. International travel is easier, quicker and more affordable than ever before, and provides many with an opportunity to meet people from people of varying backgrounds. The work environment also exposes, encourages and perhaps forces people of different backgrounds to mix. As the boundaries of nationality, ethnicity and religion become more permeable in response to this moving tide of humankind, cross-frontier marriages can be expected to increase. In line with this global trend is the fact that Jewish inter-faith cross-frontier marriages are more prevalent in modern day America than in the past. Hence, individuals live in an open society where they are more likely to meet individuals of different backgrounds. According to the National Jewish Population Study (NJPS) of 2000-01, the intermarriage rate for American Jews is as shown in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Intermarriage in the USA by year marriage began

Year marriage began	Percent Intermarried
Before 1970	13
1970-1979	28
1980-1984	38
1985-1990	43
1991-1995	43
1996-2001	47

Assimilation and globalisation as macro-processes, as well as increased interactions between Arabs and Jews in Israel, can mediate and interlink with cross-cultural desires and cross-cultural relationships. However, an important distinction between the current study sample group and those couples elsewhere (in particular Jewish-Gentile couples in America) is that these very same macro-processes were not present nor did it conform to the pattern of ever-increasing out-marriages on the international front. Hence, the positioning of Israeli Jewish & Arab cross-cultural relationships occurs within a societal space in which they are seen as the exception that needs to be justified and accounted for, as opposed to other countries where they are accepted more readily as the norm. It is within this larger framework that Israeli Jewish & Arab relationship partners pursue—and *must* pursue—their own personal happiness.

As previous analyses have shown and the NJPS data confirm (UJC, 2003), the intermarriage rate of American Jews increased considerably over the course of the second half of the twentieth century (see ‘Table 6. Intermarriage in the USA by year marriage began’). The intermarriage rate for Jews who married before 1970 stands at 13% to 28% for those whose marriages started in the 1970s, and then rose again to 38% for Jews who married in the first half of the 1980s. Since 1985, the rate of increase in intermarriages has slowed as intermarriage levels have stabilised in the mid-40% range. Among Jews whose marriages started in 1985-90, the intermarriage rate was 43%. The intermarriage rate was also 43% for Jews whose marriages began in 1991-95. Lastly, 47% of American Jews intermarried between 1996 and 2001. As the rate of, and reasons for, intermarriage is changing, so is the American Jewish community’s response towards intermarriage. The 2000 American Jewish Committee’s Survey of American Jewish Opinion (October, 2000) indicated that “the Jewish taboo on mixed marriage has

clearly collapsed.” The annual phone survey of 1,010 Jews, which follows Jewish attitudes about Israel, anti-Semitism and political issues, examined attitudes in relation to intermarriage. The survey revealed that Orthodox Jews in America maintained a strong opposition to intermarriage. Eighty-four percent of the Orthodox Jews surveyed reported that they would be ‘pained’ if their child intermarried, as opposed to 57% of Conservative Jews, 27% of Reform Jews and 19% of unaffiliated Jews. Overall, the pattern of Jewish American intermarriage was similar to ethnic intermarriage in Israel (Ashkenazim-Sephardim unions): very little intermarriage in the first generation, more in the second, and considerably more in the third.

Recognisable patterns exist for both the women in the present study as well as for other samples found in the international literature. Families are typically the first to object to the marriage, yet are generally the first to be reconciled after the union is established and grandchildren start to arrive. For some of the families, the birth of grandchildren transforms their behaviour and attitude towards those involved in the mixed marriage. Communities, however, usually retain their resentment longer. On this front, there are striking differences found in communities’ attitudes towards cross-frontier relationships in Israel and abroad. The major difference to note, as previously mentioned, is that intermarriage and assimilation between Israeli Jews & Arabs is still not encouraged in Israel. In fact, the presence of such couples in Israel infuriated certain groups and resulted in the formation of various organisations that strived to dissolve and discourage such relationships – (often successfully). Furthermore, precise statistics on the rates of these couplings occurring in Israel are not readily accessible - most likely because of the country’s stance on the unions. This is reflected by the muted response of the mass media to these mixed relationships. The lack of substantial empirical research on these couples mirrors (and perhaps perpetuates) the popular attitude of silence concerning this contentious issue. Generally speaking, the academic literature concerning these couples is impoverished.

It should be emphasised that social processes and identities within Israel and those in the Diaspora are driven by very different forces, and hence are very different from one another. Therefore it would be premature and inaccurate to generalise from results on other mixed couples to mixed Israeli Jewish & Arab couples living in Israel. Subsequently, it is by no means possible or legitimate to compare Diaspora (American) and Israeli dynamics under any circumstance; the dynamics which occur in America

cannot in any way inform processes which occur in Israel. For example, in Israel marrying across boundaries implies marrying across different boundaries of ethnicity (e.g. Ashkenazi, Sephardic, etc.) and often religion (e.g. orthodox, traditional and secular backgrounds). In contrast, 'marrying out' in the Diaspora normally denotes marrying across religious lines. Consequently, Israel must be viewed independently. Nowadays, the American attitude towards intermarriage is one of reaching out and acceptance and this has not been widely applied in the state of Israel, especially for Israeli Jewish & Arab couples. Denouncing, disowning and neglecting those involved in couple unions with their Arab partner is the most common way family and friends choose to deal with these exceptional and 'marginal' couples. Israeli Jewish & Arab couples probably suffer greater abuse from people outside their circle of acquaintance than any other inter-religious and interracial couples in Israel and elsewhere. The sentiments towards these couples echo the animosity that exists between the two groups; a deep ingrained hostility exists between Jews and Arabs, much as there was towards a Jew marrying a German during WWII. Clearly this factor is not present for mixed couples in other countries.

## **7.2 Gender patterns**

It is useful to note, for the purpose of further comparison, that cross-frontier relationship rates were also related to gender, although in complex ways. It was only Israeli Jewish women who entered these relationships in the current study. In this respect there were relevant international comparisons and commonalities with regard to gender combinations for certain time periods. The first example involved the gender patterns in Japanese American intermarriage during in the 1930s and '40s, when Asian men were negatively portrayed. Non-Japanese women were most likely influenced by this view and did not perceive them as being attractive. However, a different perception was rendered for Asian women, as they were depicted through movies and returning GIs' tales of the South Pacific as submissive, exotic, erotic women assured to please men. These images, along with the several thousand Asian war brides who came to America in the 1950s, started the trend for an increasing amount of intermarriage by Japanese American women from World War II through the 1960s. At the same time, intermarriage by Japanese American men stayed low, which indicated a female dominance towards the tendency to intermarry.

Furthermore, in parallel to previous international research into intermarried couples, the present study demonstrated that it was the dominant-group Jewish females that entered relationships with subordinate-group Arab males in Israel. Robert Merton discussed gender patterns in intermarriage in his exchange theory, in which lower-caste men marry up (Merton, 1941). Merton put forward an economy of intermarriage where lower-caste men of wealth, beauty or talent exchanged these aspects for the higher status of upper-caste women who lacked wealth, intellect, beauty, or talent. For example, in India, intermarriage between caste and non-caste people illustrated a tendency for subordinate-group males and dominant-group females to couple up. This indicates that there is a societal power dimension/status attached to being a caste and non-caste individual. This can also be applicable to Jewish and Arab, as well as White and Black, couples. Hence, it may be that there exists a power position for Israeli Jewish & Arab couples and that the significance of this societal dimension holds now, as in the 1940s USA, when Merton was writing.

However, it must be stressed that the dynamics and interpretations of this power position should remain tentative. Merton's theory is not straightforward because of subjective perceptions when deciding which way is 'up.' Taking the point from a majority-group perspective, he describes someone as improving her or his status by marrying up when a minority person marries a majority person. Consequently, a black or Jewish man marrying a white protestant woman or a Japanese American woman marrying a white husband is marrying up. However, some black, Jewish, and Japanese Americans may perceive themselves as being of higher status, as superior to Gentile Whites. As a result, which way is up depends on individual perspectives (Spickard, 1989) and implies that intermarriage is a complex phenomenon that cannot be deconstructed, as Merton suggested with his general gender rules. Hence, each couple is case-specific and should be examined according to its particular context before making predictions about which gender will marry outside the group more frequently. For example, before discussing gender patterns in intermarriage between Jewish and Arab women in Israel, one must be familiar with religious Islamic and Jewish law.

Intermarriage in light of religious laws for Muslim men and non-Muslim women (e.g. Christian and Jew) is permitted, so it is exceptional for a Muslim man to convert out of his religion. In the current study only Jewish women converted to Islam (15/29 participants) when they entered these mixed relationships. Furthermore, in parallel to

previous international research with intermarried couples, the present case study demonstrated that it was the dominant-group Jewish females that entered relationships with subordinate-group Arab males in Israel. This may be due to demographic and cultural reasons, as well as a religious one; Arab women are generally more protected and reserved than their counterparts, Israeli Jewish women. Islam does however allow Muslim men to marry non-Muslim women provided they are 'people of the book,' 'ahlal-kitāb,' meaning Jewish or Christian women. The Qur'an says, "lawful for you are the chaste women from among those who have been given the Book," (Qu'ran, chapter 5, al-Mā'ida *The Food*, verse 6). However, Muslim women are prohibited from marrying non-Muslim men to such an extent that a Muslim woman's marriage to a non-Muslim would be considered a form of illegal intercourse and any offspring from that marriage would be deemed illegitimate. This is justified by the distinct patriarchal and patrilineal descent providing the child with its name and religion. Furthermore, and in similarity to Jewish practice, a mother is expected to be the main source of religious and moral education for young children, so it is essential that she belongs to (and practices) the same religion as her children. Hence, for some, Islamic religion is a more salient factor for the Arab men who partnered off with Jewish women (i.e. the ones that converted) than Judaism is for the women in the current study. Hence, as depicted by other studies in the USA, which illustrate that a higher percentage of Gentile women than men sought conversion to Judaism, it was only the Jewish women in this study that converted to Islam. It is clear that dynamics prevalent in the United States are distinct from those which occur in Israel and comparisons should be treated with caution.

When discussing the prevalence of women entering these relationships, a question arises: what is it that these women unconsciously seek to gain by these cross-frontier relationships and what does it express? The act of marrying a partner from the 'enemy' side is an extreme act that defies societal norm. Descriptions and understanding of their motivations for pursuing these relationships will now be discussed at length. As a minority within a minority, what triggers these women to make their choice of partner someone with whom their community is at war? What other factors attracts people to each other—particularly when those differences can be the source of threats—physical, psychological, and spiritual?



### 7.3 The data reflecting the motivations for Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships

The mass media is inclined to promote stereotypes of interracial relationships being socially and psychologically deviant (Gaines & Leaver, 2002). Dating outside of one's culture can suggest a disrespect or rejection of one's culture and so people involved in cross-frontier relationships may face pressure from their own group. Not surprisingly, many people who are involved in such relationships are thought to be 'morally degenerate,' 'rebellious,' or low in self-esteem, and their relationships are thought to be less satisfying and more prone to failure (Gurung & Duong, 1999). These beliefs may be enforced by prejudice and stereotyping.

Results of studies reviewed by Gaines et al. (2005) suggest that for many interracial couples, prevailing stereotypes are inaccurate. Preconceptions of cross-frontier relationships were also challenged by the results found in the present thesis. When asked what led these women to enter these cross-frontier relationships, a combination of factors was noted. Themes of love, physical attraction and family-like substitute, amongst others, surfaced in the interviews. It is important to note that the reasons people enter into cross-frontier relationships may not differ substantially from the reasons people enter into same-background relationships. Of course, it can be claimed that the women choose a particular person rather than a community, but nevertheless, just as in the cases of cross-cultural unions in Germany immediately following the war as well as in other countries such as Northern Ireland and Lebanon, there must be alternative reasons. The fact that Jewish-Arab distinction is exceptionally prevalent in Israeli society suggests that one cannot pretend to be blind to their particular partner choice.

Motivations for entering cross-frontier interracial relationships have been examined by analysing personal ads and retrospective self-reports of individuals in these marriages in the USA. One interesting finding was that people seek these relationships because they believe they have qualities that are more attractive to other ethnicities or that they desire characteristics that are associated with individuals from other races. Indeed, three of the women who did not convert to Islam in the present study supported this claim.

*He courted me with such patience, like a gentleman, something  
that can not be found in the Israeli man, something that is very*

*honouring and pleasant. I was especially taken by his respectful behaviour: he never forced himself and never ... Israeli men always put their hands on you...* [Moria, living in an Arab village]

However, neither of these theories was supported by the analysis of personal ads from a variety of singles' magazines (Yancey & Yancey, 1998). No differences were found between ethnicities in characteristics being sought or offered by individuals who were willing to date interracially. In fact, self-reports of motivations to enter current cross-frontier interracial relationships indicate very similar motivations for entering cross-race relationships as same-race relationships (Lewis et al., 1997). All in all, it appears to be the personality of a potential mate, not the race, that most influences an individual's motivation to enter into a relationship. These conclusions corroborated with all of the women's accounts in this study. Time and again, they reported that the fact that their partner was an Arab was not an issue.

*When I met him I saw a human being and not Jewish or Arab, I don't see Jew or Muslim. It's the same thing. It's a person ... the most important is that he is a good person...* [Effy, Netanya].

*We are all human beings, the same souls, the same feelings. We marry in the same way, have children the same way. So, we are only human beings. I think that it's about time that our fate here in Israel will change* [Dana, Jaffa].

The partner is not seen as an opponent, enemy or one to be feared or destroyed. Furthermore, the women in the study also contended that it was the partner's personality that was the influential factor for entering and sustaining the relationship. Fourteen of the women reported that they were looking for something different.

*I don't like standard things. Standard things are ok, there are standard things. I, I need unique things otherwise it's boring for me* [Effy, Netanya].

*Things happen for a reason: choices I have sub-consciously taken, I was looking for something different and it was right for me [Jasmine, living in an Arab village].*

As stated previously, there are a number of theories postulated as to why individuals choose to get involved in cross-frontier relationships. The women's reports that aspects of their personality led them into these relationships are supported by the literature that describes such people as non-traditionals, individuals who do not follow norms, "do their own thing in life" (Romano, 2001, p. 7) and choose to be loners. Obviously, many women in the present study shared some of the motivations that will be described below, either separately or in combination with one another. For example, love was described by 28 of the women as being a decisive and central role in many of their lives and reason for them to enter their relationship. For them, love was the motivating factor bringing their unions together and influencing their desire to be together with their partner. Love in marriage can be defined by being "for the mutual goal of forming a family to stabilise and improve the quality of their life," (Tseng & Maretzki, 1977, p. 101). As was indicated earlier, the 15 women who converted to Islam entered their relationships at a very early adolescent age and it is suggested that a major 'deficiency' motivator for the women was to find support, love, and confirmation of their 'self,' which they were lacking from their family of origin.

*Look, a girl, a girl doesn't, doesn't eh escape to the Muslim religion if there isn't, there isn't love for the story. There, that's my entire story [Tali, Jaffa].*

Seven of the women were particularly prone to express their attraction to their partner as one of 'love at first sight.' For them, it was a relevant quality drawing them into their new relationship. This charming quality afforded them the confirmation of self which seemed so precarious and uneasy in previous situations. By being in a relationship with an Arab partner, the women seemed to have found their sense of self; the consistent emphasis and manner of expressing their love provided them with a secure sense of self. The women retained and kept alive the idealised aspects of their identity by means of being with their partner. It may be that their partners afforded them a means to obtain positive feelings about themselves and to retain inner feelings of love and goodness. As long as each partner wants to help the other fulfil him-or herself, love

can be the best motive for a cross-frontier marriage. Love is often described as being the principle grounds for marriage and is a valid motive (Romano, 2001). The subjects in Root's (2001) study, based on numerous interviews and background research, asserted that love was the motivating force in interracial marriages: "love, shared vision, and common values compel an interracial couple to marry, just as they do other couples," (Root, 2001, p. 175). Porterfield's (1978) study of married couples revealed that love was the primary reason that individuals gave as to why they had married their cross-race partners. This finding was replicated in one qualitative/quantitative study of 40 European descent/African descent married couples in Chicago by Porterfield (1978), and one qualitative study of approximately 20 European descent/African descent married couples in Minneapolis by Rosenblatt et al. (1995), both depicting that love emerged as the primary reason why individuals entered into interracial relationships. Another motive alluded to by four of the women was ideological. This motivation is particularly interesting given the political context in which these relationships have formed.

*I feel that I am very invested in this working because of this hope in this, in the world becoming a different place if we don't all stay each of us in our own segregated spots. If we mix, if we learn from each other ... If we are willing to endure each other because it is very hard and you know, just think about it on a physical level. So, there is an idealistic part in me still that I believe it should happen. It should happen more. Um, in a sense it happens very very rarely [Vanessa, Kibbutz].*

It should be noted once again that the relationships might have protected and preserved the women's identity and strengthened their psychological equilibrium, which may have been unstable as a result of their turbulent childhood backgrounds (however, three of the women explicitly reported coming from happy, well adjusted families). Although there is a positive gain, of holding any of their anxiety (which is bought at a very high price), being involved with an Israeli Arab does offer gains, such as feeling a sense of achievement about their relationship, possible happiness and offering them a sense of self and purpose in life. Hence, it may be speculated that the women felt a sense of being pioneers in the world. They talked about feeling that through their relationship they were anticipating the future in Israel where they hoped cultural and

religious differences would not be divisive. They hoped that their relationships were a sign of the breakdown of prejudice, misunderstanding and turmoil between Jews and Arabs in Israel. The women in the present study told similar accounts to some depicted in Romano's study (2001), whereby they set themselves apart from the majority in hope of breaking away from the prejudice that dominated their lives. Furthermore, some of the women also implied that their search for a family substitute was motivation for entering these relationships. Twenty-six of the women seemed to have felt uneasy in their childhood families, as depicted in their problematic childhood narratives and in the example of Jasmine's account (see '7.2 Family background synopsis I'). It may then be suggested that they project idealised parts of their self onto their partner. In these cases, the partner, and sometimes his family and community, are chosen as repositories which subconsciously 'save' the women by acting as fitting receptacles to 'hold' and contain their anxiety.

*Like, I felt safe with him, like, sometimes I even felt safer with him than in my own home. You wouldn't believe that. I was always fighting with my mother. When I was with him I would calm down. Like, you know, really relaxed. [Nina, Ramle].*

'Saving' is also an emotional phenomenon. These relationships may save and protect the women from the painful uncertainty of who they are, while also assuring a potential resolution for vulnerabilities derived from their families of origin. On this note, and in review of some of the narratives, it became apparent that many (16) of the women were searching for some sort of family environment and/or parental figure with whom they could identify. In other words, they were seeking a surrogate family to substitute what they were so clearly missing from their childhoods. Some may have felt hurt and bruised from their family of origin and gotten into the relationship hoping subconsciously for bountiful love, welcoming arms and support. The women who converted to Islam found social and cultural survival and acceptance in their partner's Arab community instead of the rejection and/or other unhealthy relationships they experienced with family members whilst growing up. The women's actual decision to enter these relationships, while prompted by various internal and external factors, was characterised by a movement towards a new family - a chance for something new, regenerating and hopeful. The warmth and acceptance by their partner, and, in some cases, his family, gave them (the converts to Islam in particular), purpose in their life

and a sense of peace. Also, the rejection by their family before and/or after entering their relationships may have created underlying resentments and irritation, which in turn, may have resulted in their marriages bearing the burden of compensation for the loss of family.

Liora, a non-convert to Islam, described an enmeshment relationship with her father whilst growing up, where they were overly involved in each other's lives in a complex and unhealthy way. It was difficult for Liora to make a clear differentiation between her life and that of her father's, a relationship resembling some sort of enmeshment:

*... and in general, I was the best child in the house, a nerd, it is possible to say, and still a little bit, that everything that I did is what my parents wanted to, I didn't rebel, I was a good girl, the best girl a couple of parents can ask for. My parents and I were in a very very very good relationship ... Very attached to my father, very, very much, so much that I don't do any little thing before my father comes and tells what to do, and get his advice, really like this [Liora, Haifa].*

Her relationship with her father fostered her dependency on her parents to an extent where she was not able to attain a sense of personal identity albeit having a sense of belonging within her family system. A clearer boundary and degree of flexibility in her family interactions were needed, and entering a relationship out of line with her parents' worldview regarding Arabs may have been her means to achieve this; this enmeshment eventually disappeared. Liora's actual decision to leave was depicted as being a movement toward a new distinctive beginning, a new sense of identity and individuality.

*I said, I have nothing to lose. I do have something to lose, my wonderful parents, yes, but they are not going to live forever. In 20, 30 years they will leave me and then I'll stay with their wishes and end up with nothing ... that's part of my perception ... why I decided to go for it, until the limits ... [Liora, Haifa].*

Liora expressed using valid psychological defences in order to protect herself, and to try to vent out her feelings. Finally she and her husband break ties with their respective families, engaging in what can be likened to a 'divorce.' For them, what is important is that they were willing to give up their parents and begin a family and 'the hard life' together. Hence, the women in the study, in return for any loss or sacrifices they endured, built up and acquired a cohesive new family. Comparable accounts were articulated in the interviews.

*With Yariv I was happy, I have found out what is happiness, love, peace. The relationship model that was in the house was distorted, very wrong. Many feelings missing, many ... and he grew up in a normal family. A family that—and I admire that—for me seeing a mother, a father, kids ... That is what my parents left for me—things that were wrong and I learn from that...*  
[Jasmine, a non-convert residing in an Arab village].

By marrying a foreigner of different tradition, Jasmine seemed to have been consciously trying to avoid recreating the pattern of her early relationships within her family of origin. The findings for this group in the present study reflect findings from the literature where such individuals were referred to as compensators (Romano, 2001). Marrying someone from a different background allowed the women to recreate their identity. Furthermore, they were given the opportunity to make up for something they always felt was missing – a truly loving and intimate relationship. In these cases, individuals were attracted to their partner's family lifestyle (Romano, 2001).

Twelve of the women who did not convert to Islam mentioned that they enjoyed the initial feelings they had when they first entered the relationship. Seemingly, it afforded them with attention, a sense of uniqueness, sense of being, confidence and identity.

*We always get attention and are treated in a special way from the Arabs. Others think we are an interesting couple ... Because I enjoyed the looks ... So, it was just fun. I loved it. I always loved it. And that's why I chose this marriage because I love those things* [Vanessa, Kibbutz].

Jasmine, whom has been discussed earlier, believed that her childhood experience made her feel insecure when relating to others. She feared others would reject her. By entering the relationships with her Arab partner she was afforded an opportunity to develop her own uniqueness and individuality within her new relationship. Converts to Islam also reported similar accounts.

*Like, my entire life is unique [laugh]. It's unique. Look, I live with it; I feel that it's unique [Efrat, Jaffa].*

The rebellion motive supports some literature that assumed that individuals engaged in cross-race relationships because of rebellious tendencies, such as the pull of 'forbidden fruit' (Gaines & Ickes, 2000). Most of the women (26) in the present study may have entered their relationship in anger as a gesture of hostility and rebellion towards their home or towards their community. For example, many of the women in the study depicted a sense of rebelliousness, a characteristic that was expressed directly or indirectly in their narrative accounts. With this in mind, turning to the interview conducted with Liat [Jerusalem], she described her individuality latent in her personality, and the flavour of rebellion is contemplated:

*No. I was always uh I was uh never never a mainstream person (laugh). I would go a long way to not be a mainstream person so it [the relationship] suited me very well only made it more ... more appealing (laugh) [Liat, Jerusalem].*

Liat [Jerusalem] perceived and acknowledged a rebellion incentive, possibly entering the relationship in anger, as a gesture of hostility and rebellion toward her home or towards her community. In this way, she gained a sense of being, an individual separate from her family of origin. A rebellious theme was ubiquitous in the women's accounts, as depicted below:

*... I was always the good child and everything ... Of course, in some stage of our relationship I asked myself if I married Oziz to get back at my father; if I married him because it's different; because I wanted to be different; because I was behaving right all my life, and suddenly I wanted to behave wrong; because I wanted my father's attention; no doubt there is something of that*



*inside ... So these reasons are part of it, no doubt there is an effect of the relations you bring from your home, and the problems you carry from your parents and everything, it is part of this marriage, because my father is convinced, for example, I think he is convinced that I only did it to get back on him. And that I only did it to show him [Chaya, Afula].*

The rebellion theme was a common thread found in the accounts told by the interviewees. Most of the women severed ties with their families of origin and wider social network, thereby creating the conditions for beliefs and practices that are not tied to the norms of wider society. In regards to the converts to Islam, and, as illustrated in the results section, they entered these relationships at a very early age. It is well known that all adolescents experience a period of their life where they must separate from their parents, rebel against authority, and construct identities of their own. Family ties, family values and nationality are some of the first sources of identity presented to children. As they reach adolescence, they choose which of their parents' values to incorporate into their own identities, and which to change. The interview material suggested that generally the converts to Islam rebelled against their upbringing in search of an identity independent from their families. Marcia (1966) asserted that decisions about religion and other ideology are fundamental in adolescents' struggles to attain identity. Conversion can result in life-transforming changes in self-defining personality functions such as a shift in identity and life meaning (Paloutzian et al., 1999). The non-converts, on the other hand, entered these relationships at a later age, and some even experienced the usual teen-aged rebellion late [e.g. Liora, Haifa].

In summary, the women's feelings of rebellion gave them a defined mission, and a definite sense of identity and being. Some reported that they felt a certain indulgence or pleasure from doing something potentially harmful and against the will of others:

*In every thing that is forbidden, there is a sweet thing. You become more attracted to him and it's a burning thing [Jasmine, living in an Arab Village].*

To reiterate, the rebellious motives found in the present study were in line with findings from other studies (Romano, 2001). In some cases some individuals were described as being rebels, trying to consciously or subconsciously marry someone from

a different background almost as a form of protest against something in their own culture that they disliked and/or wanted to avoid. This may include family, basic values or beliefs, sometimes minor or vague subtle dissatisfactions. The rebellion motive was relatively substantiated by some points put forward in the literature. A vast amount of psychological studies on intermarriage in the United States found in the literature were carried out many years ago (e.g. Little, 1942; Lehrman, 1967) and perceived individuals involved in such couples as follows:

- 1. The first group viewed intermarriage as abnormal and concluded that those who intermarried were rebellious or neurotic.
- 2. The second viewpoint that existed for these couples was that of indifference, perhaps even a positive attitude toward intermarriage. They saw those who intermarried Americans taking full part in the melting pot.
- 3. Lastly, the third group suggested that there may have been some rebellion or neurosis in the choice of intermarriage but, nonetheless, insisted that it was the best choice for some individuals (e.g. Spickard, 1989).

Some of these opinions were based on relatively objective analyses of tangible data, for example divorce statistics, while others were biased by personal beliefs or prejudice. However, what should be emphasised here is the similarity of rebellious motivations suggested from past studies and that of the present study.

The other motive that surfaces in the literature and is exemplified by the women entering these relationships, is a sense of adventure. Without a spirit of adventure, the women may not have been as ready to leave everyone and everything familiar in order to pursue the relationship they wanted. The women in the study shared a common characteristic: a spirit of adventure and curiosity about the world. The women suggested that they didn't intentionally set out to find an Arab partner, but after meeting their partner they were open to the idea of marriage, and ready for the adventure it would bring:

*... in a way it was for the adventure [Liat, Jerusalem ].*

*And, from the beginning ... really, eh, like an adventure. Like this. Adventure, and I succeeded my mission. And that's it*  
[Naama, Jaffa].

The relationships created a sense of adventure simultaneously to igniting feelings of romance.

*No... on the contrary it [the relationship] only made it more... more appealing [laughs]* [Liat, Jerusalem].

On a similar note, Jasmine [village] described her romantic sentiment.

*There is something romantic about being with the other. It's important to have this in a relationship ... it is us against the world. Of course it is us against the world (laughs); it is very special and romantic. Our relationship is very strong; it is us against the world, ok? The whole world is against us so ... we are very strong, that's important and it adds to it* [Jasmine, living in an Arab village].

Their partner is not seen as an opponent, enemy or one to be feared or destroyed. Instead, the Arab partner is viewed as an exception or different, laying the bedrock for a profound relationship and an avenue for setting the grounds of a separate identity from their family of origin and romance. The women in the present study reflect accounts put forward in other studies (Romano, 2001), where some individuals reported that marrying someone from a different culture provided differences that provided and enhanced the challenge, adventure and excitement of their romance across frontiers.

Comparable to those who reported that the 'exotic is erotic,' so too did three of the women in the present study. For instance, Karen [Jerusalem] reported the following:

*He is a Bedouin and eh part of the attraction was because he was different ... It was romantic, like a hero, like an adventure. Like, something from the books, dreams* [Karen, Jerusalem].

Karen [Jerusalem], and two other women, explicitly revealed this: 'it was a bit for adventure.' Slotkin and Resnik composed theoretical models of several types of

Jewish personalities that were inclined to intermarriage (Slotkin, 1942; Resnik, 1933). Their lists illustrated five main types: the neurotic, the rebellious, the adventurous, the marginal, and the acculturated. Neurotic individuals who intermarried typically suffered unresolved conflicts with their opposite sex parents, similar to that which was described by the Levinsons. This in turn made it impossible for them to establish or develop sexual relationships with Jews of the opposite sex (Heiss, 1976; Lehrman, 1967; Ellman, 1971). Rebellious individuals who intermarried were from families that were cold and lacking in understanding, or went through painful experiences growing up, which they eventually identified with Judaism. They then both deliberately and bitterly rejected Judaism and Jewish people (Heiss, 1976). The adventurous were not able to be specific regarding what motivated them towards intermarriage, but they tended to have enterprising, inquisitive, and risk-taking personalities. They considered non-Jewish partners exotic.' The findings from the current study verify some of the contentions mentioned above.

So where does this leave us with respect to the question posed in this section? Are certain kinds of people prone to enter these relationships? There is no single answer but what we have seen here is that various possibilities may have triggered these women to enter these relationships, such as having an unhappy or discontented childhood. Having discussed some motivations for entering these relationships we will now move into a discussion of the women's personal backgrounds, showing how personal background and cultural group preferences may relate, as in the previous studies conducted. As indicated earlier, it is through the family that an individual acquires attitudes and values. It is the family that functions as the matrix through which fundamental relationships influence later personality development and growth. Studying the women in the context of their family experiences enables processes to be traced as they move both from the family towards the neighbourhood, and consequently partner choice, and vice versa. Having considered various motivations for entering these relationships, the next section will concentrate on identity. It will look at the continually interactive and reciprocal nature and relationship of identity and choosing a partner from another cultural background.

## 7.4 Identity

Overall, the women's childhood and adolescence may influence the life-long processes by which they come to know their individual identities and how they deal with relationships with others. The women's difficult childhoods may have generated fear of being unloved and identity conflicts due to low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy. In other words, their damaged self-esteem owing to their childhood experiences of deprivation and rejection may have prompted them to choose an Arab partner. Alternatively, their decision to enter these relationships could be regarded as an indirect attack on their family--an element of teenage rebellion against family and society in its purest form.

There is substantial evidence that early experiences can determine how women may develop their concept of self and identity. Heinz Kohut's (1972) concept of 'self,' in his developmental theory, may throw light on some of these results. Kohut emphasised the importance of empathic and responsive parents who are able to attune to the child's age-appropriate needs, where the failure of such relationships results in psychopathology. Subsequently, the child's disappointment in his/her caregivers may impinge on the child's sense of self, which could induce a feeling of low self esteem and loneliness. It has been acknowledged that children with an emotionally deprived childhood develop a general low conception of self. This lack of positive regard towards the self generally includes feelings of inadequacy, a sense of unworthiness, increased anxiety, and depression (Coopersmith, 1967).

Emotional deprivation in childhood is not the only factor influencing the individual's concept of self and identity. It has also been found that any experience of adversity, such as physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, as well as early emotional childhood deprivation, results in a sense of self that is predominantly negative in nature (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). Essentially, these experiences decrease a developing person's self-competence and worthiness (Mruk, 1999). Browne and Finkelhor (1986, p. 156) noted that "although a negative self-concept was not confirmed as an initial effect [of abuse], evidence for it as a long-term effect was much stronger." Bagley and Ramsay (1986) reported a lower self-esteem rate (19%) among women who were sexually abused as children than for their control group (59%). Similarly, Herman (1981) conveyed that 60% of her clinical sample of 40 victims of incest had a negative self-

image as compared to 10% of her control group. One of the most notable studies supporting the position that abuse does have powerful developmental, behavioural, and clinical implications for a child's healthy self-esteem was found in the work of Swanston et al. (1997). They concluded that sexually abused children manifested more types of mental health problems such as low self-esteem, low self-worthiness, depression, anxiety, binge eating and self-injury, and that the trauma inflicted onto the child was a significant developmental influence that continued over time. Furthermore, the extent of influence on one's concept of self is related to other factors such as identity of the abuser, the frequency of abuse, its severity, the child's age and level of developmental maturity, the degree of social support present (e.g. presence of siblings), and an individual's personality and resilience (Mruk, 1999). Negative experiences impinge on and become incorporated into the women's history, and subsequently can affect later relationships and behaviour in life (Howe, 1998). While no accounts of sexual abuse were reported by the women in the present study, similar mechanisms did seem to occur for the women who were emotionally abused. Moreover, the above findings may also have relevance for the decisions of the women participants in this study to enter and commit to relationships with Arab partners. In addition, the women showed more signs of psychopathology on the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) than Israeli norms. It may be that the very presence of the researcher herself and the interview discussion (which lasted between one and three hours) concerning sensitive topics not normally discussed could have opened up their internal 'bleeding wounds.' Vulnerable feelings may have subsequently emerged such that they had a higher tendency to mark scores that would have otherwise been marked as marginal. This study's findings can only provide pointers for investigation in a future study. Essentially, an in-depth inquiry into the women's mental health should be conducted.

The women's role and position within their childhood families and community as children bear on their identity development. The women in the study share the same underlying experience—a troubled childhood with their family of origin. I am not in any way suggesting that any Israeli Jewish woman experiencing such conflicts in her childhood will necessarily and always be driven towards entering these relationships. It is suggested that of the life history material it is these conflicts that may have spilled over into the women's involvement in these relationships. Hence, of interest with this group is the solution of marrying a partner or being in a relationship with a partner from

a different cultural background. Even in rational terms this would be likely to present a new set of problems yet was the solution of choice. Are people who experienced a troubled childhood in the state of Israel unable to achieve a sense of self? Are they more susceptible to choose a partner by virtue of the difference between them and their Arab partner, someone from the 'enemy side' because of identity problems? Working through identity conflicts will now be discussed in the women who converted to Islam for their partner.

## **7.5 Converts and conversion**

It is our sense of self and identity that defines our interactions with others. This study used Erikson's theory about identity development as it is relevant in adolescents—the stage at which the women who converted to Islam entered their relationships with their Arab spouses. According to Erikson's stages of identity development, the onset of identity crisis is in the teenage years, and only individuals who succeed in resolving the crisis will be ready to face future challenges in life.

Erikson's conclusions are indeed eye opening; in discussing major patterns in the study, many of the women involved in the study met their partner at a very early adolescent age and also converted to Islam out of love, for the sake of their children, and as a means to affirm their identity. As mentioned in the results section, 16 out of the 29 women met their Arab partner before they turned 20 years old. In fact, all the women (10) in Jaffa were younger than 19 years old when they met their partner, younger than most of the other subjects in the present sample. This contradicts the general trends of intermarriage since 1960 (Root, 2001), where intermarriage occurred at a later age. Another important facet worth noting was that most (26) of these women expressed recollections of hatred, resentment and hostile attitudes towards their parents whilst growing up.

*Oh, [my relationship with my family] was difficult. It was very difficult. It was very difficult. Very very. Look, it's an entire story. It wasn't good for me in my family. I suffered a lot. My father was a man alcoholic, he eh hit us; it was difficult [Tali, Jaffa].*

Examining the broader environmental and social context in which these women were socialised should help to better understand any prevailing psychological phenomena that may have provoked some of the women to convert to Islam and marry an Arab. For example, as Ullman (1989) states, the father may serve as a mediator between the family and the outside world and who help's the child secure her perception of reality outside the home as safe and manageable. Therefore, a father who is absent, withdrawn, harsh or rejecting may cause the child to make an active attempt to change aspects of her socialisation; the child may begin to search for protection and meaningful structure, and to establish a definite sense of self different from her family of origin. Religious conversion may be an expression of an attempted solution for these consequences of inadequate fathering. As the results of individual-level studies accumulated, the researcher began to find that the women converts' narratives converged to reveal the point that they not only had a troubled upbringing in their family of origin but also did not feel a part of their own cultural group in which they were raised.

*I didn't have friends, I didn't have friends. I really didn't. I never had friends. Eh, my friends now eh like, my son, my husband, me, my husbands family [Shani, Jaffa].*

A lack of friends may be an indication of lack of trust, a deep-seated aspect of their personality and part of their identity. Perhaps their early upbringing accounted, wholly or in part, for this degree of basic mistrust. The fact that the converts were adolescents when entering these relationships suggests that they turned towards another culture to obtain not only a sense of self, but also a sense of belonging. According to theorists (Erikson), identity formation develops and forms during the time of youth. All social, emotional and even intellectual changes in adolescence have their root in basic body chemistry and these biochemical changes allow for reproduction and changes in body size and strength. The biological beginning of adolescences is marked by the beginning of puberty and how long it lasts is affected by cultural and individual differences. It's a 'process of transition' and a 'crisis' for the young person. Anna Freud (1949) emphasised the significance of the pre-adolescent (12-14 years old) period of life. The pre-adolescent begins to turn away from the parents, to reject the parents, but has not yet made the new attachments that characterise adolescence proper. Anna Freud says that while the first five years lay the foundation of neurotic development, it is the



experiences in pre-adolescence and adolescence that will determine how much infantile neurosis will be reactivated and will become a threat to mental health. She believes that in pre-adolescence there is a marked increase in drive activity and this serves to re-activate all the component instincts of infantile sexuality and aggression and creates an overwhelming need for the fulfilment of these wishes. The pre-adolescent child is characteristically weak and wavering in her allegiances, lonely, narcissistic, and self-centred. The fact that the converts also had problematic childhoods, overlapping into adolescence, may reflect overwhelming feelings of loneliness.

*I didn't have eh friends. I never had eh ... I had a (girl) friend but I didn't go out, with friends. Not at all. Never went out with friends. Not at all [Tali, Jaffa].*

Tali's inability to relate to her peers reflects impaired feelings of trust, a part of her identity. Overall, the study finds generic processes that are seen as linking unresolved identity conflicts on the one hand and, on the other, entering a relationship with an Arab partner. The women who converted to Islam during adolescence seemed to be on a quest for contentment, a sense of self and of belonging.

#### 7.5.1 *The developmental phase of adolescence*

The following section will discuss the developmental phase of adolescence, which will set the framework for the discussion of identity analysis that will follow. It is not a question of the presence or absence of conflict, as a far more complex picture emerges involving a pattern of interactive inner and outer forces. This emphasises the viewpoint of this study that in human behaviour there are seldom direct lines of cause and effect by which the simple presence or absence of certain inner conflicts will mechanically lead to specific outcomes.

Adolescence is a period of heightened stress due to social, psychological and bodily changes that increase the importance of identity issues. In this period there are inner and outer tasks that involve conflict and choice. An identity crisis during adolescence is seen as necessary and almost healthy if completed. It is a stage in life that entails 'acting out' where the physical manifestation of independence can be seen in risk taking, sexual promiscuity, and leaving home. This finding is in line with some

(four) of the women's childhood narratives, which depicted them running away from home in order to be with their Arab partner:

*So I ran away from home. I ran away from home, to Jamil's [Arab husband] home. And then it started ... I first ran away from home. Later they brought me back and took me to my sister's place. Yes, the police brought me back. The second time, I also ran away [to Jamil] and the police brought me back and then they [parents] kept me one year at home, locked at home, they didn't allow me to go out. They didn't let me leave the house. Yes and the third time, two days before my 18th birthday, I left home and that's it. And since then they don't speak [Naama, Jaffa].*

Adolescence is a time for moving away from the close and familiar security of home and school to the wider variety of people and ideas in the world at large. Adolescence is a life crisis period where past structures of adaptation and defences do not sufficiently integrate into this period's new demands. This in turn leads to anxiety, perplexity, and at times, even impulsive action, which may render the adolescent to regress. "But, through this 'healthy crisis' comes the ability to test out the widest array of responsiveness to the new situation paving the way for potential further development. A person who is unable to undergo this 'crisis' is unhealthy and remains immature. Adolescent upheaval is inevitable; there are external indications that such internal adjustments are in progress," (Freud, 1958, p. 264). Adolescent developmental conditions find compensatory relief in the group, the gang. In turn, this social formation becomes the substitute for the adolescent's family. The converts interviewed, however, experienced feelings of isolation from their cultural community whilst growing up.

*I never had friends. No one at all. With us, the Yemenites, we don't know what friends, friends are... [Tali, Jaffa].*

A turbulent childhood coupled with a lack of satisfactory relationships with those in their own culture may have activated the participants' hostilities to potential same-culture partners. Hence, the women in this study may have found comfort and relief from their family of origin in their respective Arab husbands' families and communities.

In summary, adolescence is the period where dynamics of autonomy and relating to others assume special significance from an individual perspective. Steinberg and Silverberg (1986) considers 'emotional autonomy' from parents as an important feature of individuation, following Anna Freud's (1958) and Blos's (1979) psychoanalytic conceptualisation of adolescence autonomy in terms of a second 'separation-individuation process' (Mahler, 72). Others (e.g. Hoffman, 1984) also emphasise the distancing of the adolescent from parents as autonomy (defined as separateness). In fact, the importance of distancing and disengaging of adolescents from parents is a significant phase of healthy development. Hence, it is clear that adolescents are involved in many emotional, cognitive and behavioural issues. The adolescent struggles with life or has ideological conflicts regarding selflessness or emotional intensity. Many of the converts reflect this tension and quest for identity, and looked for a partner outside of their community as a means of identity achievement. Their cognitive development relates to their religious concerns and this may signify a period of faith development for them, an ideal context for religious conversion to occur. Conversion may therefore provide them with a solution to their identity confusion (Gillespie, 1991).

#### 7.5.2 *Adolescent conversion and identity*

It is possible that religious conversional change is more likely to occur at certain stages of life development than others. In fact, the majority of the research on conversion agrees that it is primarily an adolescent phenomenon. Records of 15,471 conversion cases between 1899 and 1950s show that the average age is 15 years (Kose, 1996). The majority of conversion literature (e.g. Christensen, 1963; Gillespie, 91; Kose, 1996) suggests that adolescence is the most likely period for conversion. Starbuck (1911/1899), for example, found that it occurred most frequently at the age of 16 for boys and 13 for girls. Furthermore, this trend seems to prevail today (Francis, 1984; Paloutzian, 1983). The overall impression from the relevant conversion literature reviewed (Kose, 1996) is that conversion has a special appeal to disorganised, disturbed youth alienated from their family of origin. Deutsch (1975, p. 166), for example, studied 14 members of the New York-based Meher Baba cult and described how virtually all gave histories of "chronic unhappiness and unsatisfactory parental relations." He found that all but a few of the parental marriages were described as unhappy. Ullman (1989, p. 11-16; 1982, p. 189), studying 40 converts from the various groups of born-again Christians, the repentant Jews, the Hare Krishna devotees, and the Bahai converts,

found that converts characterised their childhood as unhappy more often than non-converts. About a half of converts (47.5%) in Ullman's sample were judged as describing an extremely unhappy childhood while only six (15%) were judged as describing a normal or happy childhood. They reported specific, disturbing even traumatic events, namely early parental divorce or death, witnessing a parent attempt suicide, violent fights, or recurrent mental breakdowns.

Conversion age for the present sample is significantly consistent with previously mentioned studies of religion conversion in the West. Indeed the women who converted to Islam all did so between the ages of 15-18, which is the prime time for conversion. There is general agreement with findings from other studies and the present one that the women who converted to Islam in the present study experienced some trauma whilst growing up, as depicted by the following recollection:

*I grew up without a mother; she died when I was a baby. I suffered a lot. My father was married to someone else, not my mother. And a woman of my father like this is not like a mother. We suffered a lot, my brother and me. I suffered a lot [Sara, living in an Arab Village].*

Salzman (1953), suggesting a distinction between 'progressive' and 'regressive' conversions, traced the regressive conversion back to a hated father figure or father symbol. The majority of Deutsch's (1975) sample described their fathers as hostile and critical. He also found that at least four of the 14 converts' fathers were absent. Similarly, in Ullman's study the importance of the father figure was a central theme in interviews with 40 converts. Almost 80% of Ullman's sample was judged as experiencing an extremely stressful relationship with their fathers and from converts' childhood memories their fathers emerged as either absent, extremely passive, or actively rejecting. About 1/3 of them had very little or no contact with their biological fathers since the ages of four or five. Forty-five percent had fathers whom they perceived as weak, withdrawn, or hostile. Only 18% were judged as describing a positive relationship with their fathers (Ullman, 1989). In the light of these findings Ullman concluded that "the absence, withdrawal, or hostility of the father places specific obstacles in the individual's development." The women's accounts supported the above.

This seems to indicate that a disturbed relationship with the father can affect the child's perspective on moral prohibitions, hampering their perception of their environment as safe and masterable. This implies that important events preceding conversion may intensify the need for a protective father figure through a religious conversion, whereby an inhibitory structure is imposed. "The protection of an omnipotent authority figure is supplied, offering ways of by-passing these obstacles while simultaneously reflecting them," (Ullman, 1989, p. 59).

American psychologists (Starbuck et al., cited in Kose, 1996) focusing on Christian conversion concluded in most cases that conversions were a part of the inevitable intense social and psychological changes of adolescence.

*I met my husband when I was 15 and I said, how can I tell you, I said, Halas<sup>32</sup>, I want to get married. To get it done already ...  
What can you do? [Sara, living in an Arab village].*

Fear, a sense of sin, despair, and feelings of guilt and anger were some of the characteristics of the pre-conversion state (James 1962/1902, Starbuck 1911/1899). Several other authors have reported a period of unhappiness, doubt or searching among converts, in the pre-conversion period (Bragan et al., 1977). In Ullman's (1982) study, converts reported more traumatic events during childhood and described their childhood and adolescence as unhappy. In the interview with converts, personal stress was also reported as characterising the two-year period preceding conversion and as being involved in the immediate consequences of conversion (Kose, 1996). The above claims seem quite reasonable; feelings of despair and subsequent escape were also recollected by Tali [Jaffa] in my interview with her:

*I ran away from home, you understand. It's a story, what can I tell you? Eh I had, how do you say it? Had a very very difficult childhood. Very very difficult. And so I decided to marry a Muslim [Tali, Jaffa].*

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<sup>32</sup> An Arabic word, which is slang, meaning 'enough.'

This shortening of the period of stress and crisis in the context of the family of origin was exemplified throughout the interviews; the women converts in the present study adopted beliefs, cognitive changes and a lifestyle different from that of their family of origin and deviated from their cultural upbringing. Daniella and Ayala (both living in Arab villages) both had a religious Jewish upbringing and decided to give up their past life for a new one. They thereby secured their commitment to their Arab partner and entry into adulthood. The women shied away from their parents' religious orientation and adopted new views, often severing their ties with their former social milieu. The converts revealed a childhood history that consisted of a long period of steady belief in Judaism and observance, followed by a marked departure from it, experiencing a radical change in their everyday lives. By adopting a religion or a worldview opposed to that of their parents these young people, adolescents at the time, wished to separate from their parents, which constitutes a very effective context for establishing a definite identity. This fact is striking; conversion, coupled with their relationship with their Arab partner, dissociated the participants from the influences of the childhood parental authority that dominated their lives. In light of the above is Erikson's concept of identity formation, where he posits that the process of conversion can be classified as 'identity achieved.' Another point to consider, and separate from the above, is the fact that developmental psychologists note that adolescents desire a rational explanation about everything and so believe that religion helps to provide them with a solution to individual problems of identity and purpose in life (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975). The feeling of an achieved identity is strengthened by their formation of a new commitment to their Arab partner. They yearned to associate themselves with something else, to belong to a different group, the Muslim ideology thereby guaranteeing them a framework from which they could achieve this identity definition.

*At the religion of Muslim there is a lot of respect to their woman, a lot, a lot of respect to the woman. With the Jews they also have respect but not like there is with the Muslims ... There is a lot a lot of respect for the woman, they do everything... like, one respects the other [Tali, Jaffa].*

Returning to the point made earlier, feelings of alienation and loneliness within the family of origin and the cultural background of the collectivist Israeli Jewish society led them to search for a respite from those feelings. Studies on new religious

movements (Rambo, 1993; Christensen, 1963) generally indicate that they have a special appeal to disorganised, disturbed youth alienated from their family of origin. Likewise, the women in the study reported that they were welcomed into their Arab husband's family and his community accepted them:

*But they are good with me, you understand? So, they accepted me. That's all. It is ok [Daniella, living in an Arab village].*

This finding is also supported by Taylor and Tucker (1997), who claim that willingness to out-marry is based more on instrumental concerns for the women than the men. In other words, women who felt lonely and not content were more willing to consider intermarriage. The present study's findings support this:

*I had a psychologically difficult childhood. I am the 11th child of my mother. I was born, I mean, after 10 brothers I was born, the last one. The last one. Yes. Now, my parents were old. My parents are old. I needed parents that could be my friends. I was the most developed regarding the generation because I was the youngest one. So I had a different perspective about life. You understand? So I lived in a way that I didn't think that maybe my parents have more experience. After all, they are older. They have the right way of thinking. But, when a person is young he doesn't think about this. You understand? [Dana, Jaffa].*

The feeling of loneliness within their own family, combined with meeting their partner during their adolescence, may have triggered urgency in their psychic structure for a quick maturational forward surge. For them, this was illustrated by their desire and intense drive to obtain a sense of selfhood and belonging from the partner and from his respective family and community. For example, Daniella, a convert to Islam, believes that the wearing of the Hijab<sup>33</sup> gives her protection and distinction, in particular a protection from the evil of men:

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<sup>33</sup> A head covering that distinguishes Muslim women from others.

*I don't go like this with wild hair I also pray. Yes. I pray. I pray the Muslim prayer I don't go like this outside. No, I wear Muslim, that's it. But I wear the cover for the head already for four years. Four years? For four years I wear this head covering. It's more beautiful, nicer ... A woman my age, it's enough; she doesn't have to go wild and all that. For the woman that doesn't want her hair to show to the outside, for the entire world to see. And that she will wander around outside and all ... So she will be more traditional, that she, for a woman to look good, you understood? [Daniella, living in an Arab village].*

Wearing the 'Gilba'<sup>34</sup> gives Gavriella [Jaffa] a feeling of distinction and adds meaning to her identity, despite the problems encountered:

*Yes, I wanted. I wanted to be religious. I first of all started to pray, yes, without wearing the traditional dress. Later, eh, I started to wear it. I, I myself wanted ... And I don't go there [to visit her parents] because I am dressed like this so it's not acceptable over there that I will show up dressed like this. And because of this I don't go there. I want to go sometime soon. But, not yet, not yet ... But, eh ... I don't know. But I can't, can't take it off [the traditional dress], I don't feel its right to take it off. This is how it's done [custom] ... Like, if I just want to leave everything like this, I can't. Because if I go to my mother's, then I need ... then I can't wear this and I have to wear this. If I go to my mother then I would not be an Arab anymore, would not be religious anymore. I would not pray there anymore [Gavriella Jaffa].*

Hence, the women's childhood history has spilled into different areas of their lives—it may have functioned as an activator, which encouraged them to choose a partner from another community. The converts' Arab partners and their respective

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<sup>34</sup> An Arabic term to describe the long traditional dress Arabs wear.



communities served as a magnet to these women, keeping them drawn into their spouse's way of life; the Muslim community provides affirmation, encouragement, guidance and a model for a person's ongoing adaptation and development and a means for them to secure a sense of identity. Most of the interviewees reported that they received this sponsorship from the Muslim community around them. Muslims welcomed them with great sympathy in the sense that they embraced Islam willingly.

*Ok, ok. Ask about me in the entire village, ask [who is] Moria and they will tell you what. They love me. I no, eh, I never argued with anyone, I never made problems, never. Everything is ok. They love me a lot ... They appreciate me; it's ok [Moria, village].*

This confirmation gave them a sense of self, a part of the process of becoming an adult and moving from a 'divided self' into a 'unified self' and securing 'a better life.'

*Look, I don't want to tell you [laugh] that I am so good. But, here, in the village, in our neighbourhood everyone likes me [Sara, living in an Arab village].*

The women repeatedly reported experiences similar to the one below:

*He [husband] respects me, he looks after me ... I am respected ... I am respected and I love the people. My village, it's my life, that's all [Daniella, living in an Arab village].*

All, except for one, of the women who converted to Islam were welcomed by their Arab partner's Muslim families. The respect they received from the Arab community was a reassurance for their identity achieved, restoring their wounded self-esteem from their childhood.

*He knows it's difficult for me and he really appreciates me for what I did, really, he says 'I could never find myself a better woman. You did a lot for me; I will respect you all my life' [Nina, Ramle].*

Hence, if others are impressed, it reassures the women that they are important, thereby strengthening their sense of self and identity.

*Yes, their respect, their respect is completely different. They have a lot of respect to the woman. They give her a lot of respect, no. There isn't, they give her respect [Shani, Jaffa].*

Hence, converting to Islam is a very effective context for affirming identity, as it is generally accompanied by a social support system that supports the new identity and regulates interpersonal conduct. The sense of willingness to look out for the good of their friends/neighbours was reported more than once:

*Believe me, neighbours are better than family. My neighbours are very good, like a family. Like, I live in a middle of family. I never felt that I ... that I miss anything. Really I am not missing anything. I have a good friend, I have another good friend, I have good neighbours. You know the saying, 'a good neighbour is better than a distant brother' [Tali, Jaffa].*

The women attempted to make their lives more bearable, to restore their shaken self-esteem and resolve some of their identity conflicts that derived from their disturbed childhood history. Social support found in Arab communities was a way for some of the converts to presumably restore their self-esteem. The period of adolescence coupled with their troubled childhood and lack of friends intensified the need they had to find compensatory relief in the group, namely the Arab community. In turn, the social formations became the substitute for the adolescents' families. Hence, more important than anything else is the women's new support system, which helps them cope with conversion's unknown outcomes and consequences. It should also be noted that if one has solved an identity crisis, later changes might trigger a renewal of the crisis.

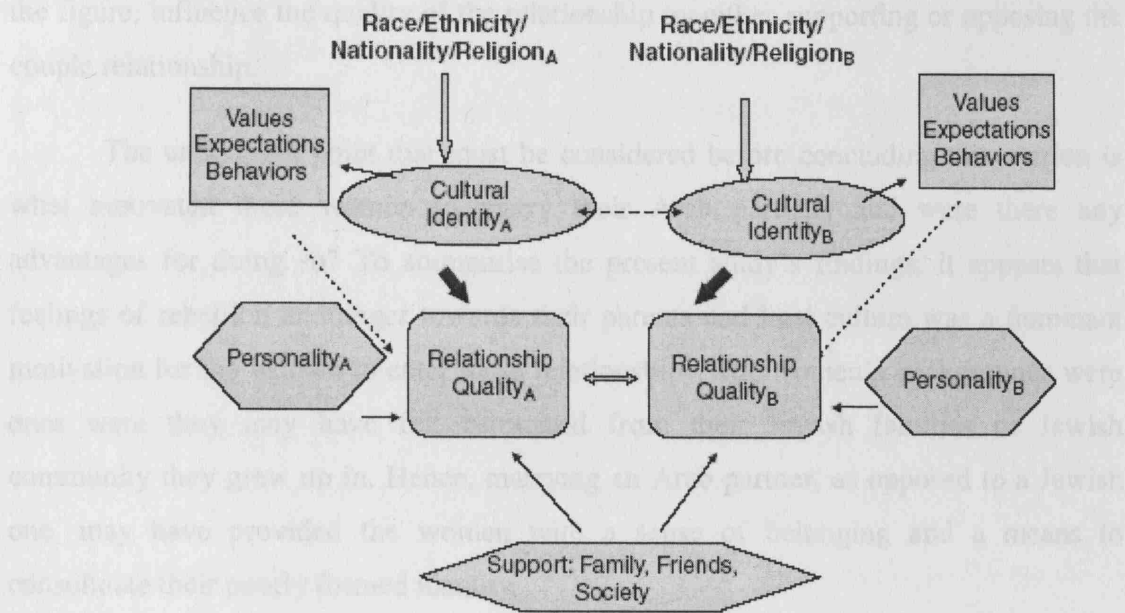
Thus, the women's feelings of alienation and loneliness within their family of origin might be a relevant and crucial factor for becoming involved with their Arab partner and adopting his way of life, by living in his community. A solely psychodynamic explanation of these relationships may be unsatisfactory, as a more comprehensive exploration of cultural and sociological political, economic or sociological factors is needed. Furthermore, converting to Islam provided them with a

way to gain a sense of individuality- a sense of identity. By rebelling against their families and their cultural upbringing, these women established their identity, their freedom from convention, and the beginning of their life's journey as a couple. While three of Erikson's defining characteristics of identity are largely intra-psychic (a sense of uniqueness, a feeling of continuity over time, and a sense of ego completeness), his fourth characteristic demands identification with the ideals of some group that affirms the sense of self that is the final achievement of a healthy sense of identity. It permits a free and continuous commitment to group values and people that characterises fidelity. The identity that the women who converted to Islam take on is Muslim, which is facilitated through their religious conversion and active participation in daily life (living in Muslim neighbourhoods in Arab villages or in an Arab neighbourhood of a mixed town).

The women's involvement with their Arab partners provided a transitional period during which previously organised life patterns were questioned and re-appraised and new possibilities for change were explored. During this process, an awareness of the social and historical context of her life, awareness of private aspirations, qualities of character, torments and fulfilments are important in facilitating her capacity to deal with the task at hand. Thus, the pattern of life the women choose to pursue, namely by choosing an Arab partner, reflects, to a great extent, the conception and re-organisation of their self. In this sense, the women's explanations can be understood within the tenets of conceptions of the self. The widely accepted conceptualisations of the self have described it as an entity that is central (Kernberg, 1982), structured (Kohut, 1977, 1984), and that reflects the representations an individual has about herself (Fonagy et al., 1991). De Waele (1996) conceptualises the self-system as the experiential being that organises and regulates itself. The organisation of the self is built upon the experiences (internal in relation to oneself, and external in relation to objects and the world outside the individual) that the individual undergoes, and the capacity to represent the experiences.

Up to this point, the ideas presented have been largely concerned with understanding the psychological relationship between unresolved personal conflicts and choosing a partner from a different cultural background. The participants' decisions to enter these relationships derive from inner causes and also from a whole range of social,

environmental, situational as well as psychological factors. Figure 2 below explores a potential pathway for the development of these relationships.



**Figure 2.** A heuristic study of cross-frontier relationships

The model presented in Figure 2 above was developed by Gaines et al., (2005) in the discussion of intercultural couples and to illustrate various factors which influence these relationships in general. Likewise, the figure is useful for the discussion of Israeli Jewish & Arab cross-frontier couples where the identity of each individual relationship member differ in terms of nationality, ethnicity, and religiosity; one partner is an Israeli Jewish woman (either an Ashkenazi or Sephardic, reform, traditional or religious Jew), while the other one is Israeli Arab man (either a Muslim or Christian). Carrying on, each individual enters the cross-frontier relationship with his or her own culture, which in turn influences each individual's identity and self-concept (essentially their core sense of self) from which relationship-related processes occur (Gaines et al., 2005).

The Israeli Jewish woman and Arab man enter their relationship with their own cultural identities, which in turn influence their own values and relationship expectations. These values and expectations are also significant in that it affects the relationship between culture and cultural identity and relationship quality, whereby the relationship quality of each relationship partner influences the other. Personality traits

and interpersonal characteristics of each individual are also factors impacting on relationship quality (e.g. personality tendencies, etc.), but is independent from the role of cultural identity. Lastly, societal structures/ social networks, depicted at the bottom of the figure, influence the quality of the relationship by either supporting or opposing the couple relationship.

The underlying point that must be considered before concluding this section is what motivated these women to marry their Arab partners and were there any advantages for doing so? To summarise the present study's findings, it appears that feelings of rebellion and anger towards their parents and host culture was a dominant motivation for the women to enter these relationships. The women's backgrounds were ones where they may have felt ostracised from their Jewish families or Jewish community they grew up in. Hence, marrying an Arab partner, as opposed to a Jewish one, may have provided the women with a sense of belonging and a means to consolidate their poorly formed identity.

## **8 Enduring nature of cross-frontier relationships**

The Torah (the Jewish Bible), states that Jews should avoid intermarriage because their children will turn to other religions: "You shall not intermarry with them: do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. For you will turn your children away from Me to worship other gods..." (Deuteronomy 7:1-3). In general, intermarriage occurred when a Jew made a conscious decision to avert from his/her religion and heritage and assimilate into Christian society. Consequently, the Jewish community rejected and denounced those Jews who intermarried. Intermarriage has been problematic for Jews since biblical times; the patriarchs and their successors attempted to prohibit intermarriage, but, nonetheless, intermarriage continued to exist. Jewish communities have excluded intermarried couples and their offspring in fear that their presence would encourage others to intermarry (Schoenfeld, 1969).

Jewish leaders believed that intermarriage was unreasonable and a threat to maintaining ethnic unity and the survival of the Jewish identity. It is therefore not surprising that for these same Jewish leaders anyone who rejected the Jewish identity by intermarrying had rebellious or neurotic intentions. In a 1965 marriage manual, Rabbi Roland Gittelsohn (1965) described the type of personality apt to marry out as "unorganised or demoralised, ...detached, ...rebellious, ...marginal," (cited in Spickard, 1989, p. 207). Rabbi Henry Kagan (1970) asserted a few years later that most intermarriage resulted from 'neurotic interaction between parent and child' (cited in Spickard, 1989, p. 207). In line with this reasoning was Samuel Lehrman's, a psychiatrist, argument presented in his article entitled 'Psychopathology in Mixed Marriages.' In his capacity as a psychiatrist, he concluded that intermarriage was to a large extent an outcome of the following: 1) unresolved Oedipus complex and incest-taboo problems (exaggerated phobia of incest); 2) debasement in the sphere of love (special types of choice of object made by men, misalliance, and 'family romance' in reverse); 3) hostility as a result of disappointment of unconscious incestuous love impulses, often accompanied by masochism; 4) exaggerated narcissism, including the phallic significance of the marriage bond; 5) exhibitionism; 6) the conviction that one is an exception; 7) counterphobic and fetishistic attitudes and choices which defend against castration anxiety (Lehrman, 1967, p. 67-82). Others (Davidson, 1992; Pope, 1986) have put forward theories maintaining that attraction to individuals of other races

indicates psychological maladjustment and self-loathing and that they occur due to neurotic motivations.

*The worst insult I ever heard was from a very good friend when she said that when she saw who I married she asked herself why I hated myself so much that I would marry him. You know, and it got to me to the extent I got to thinking to myself was it because I think of myself as so inferior as why I chose someone and I wondered if that ever crossed your mind with the woman you interview [Vanessa, Kibbutz].*

Opponents to interracial black-white couples in the USA were not scarce, and they typically referred to higher divorce rates as the rationale behind their objections (Root, 2001). In 1919, David De Sola Pool alleged it was “three or four times more likely” that divorce would be the outcome of intermarriage. He therefore posited that this is “clear proof that a mixed marriage is far more likely to turn out unhappily than a normal marriage,” (cited in Spickard, 1989, p. 224). In many cases, harassment from relatives and the public, as well as the belief that mixed couples were culturally incompatible, would in fact break them apart.

Hence, a number of authors (Davidson, 1992; Pope, 1986) suggest that cross-frontier relationships are weaker than conventional marriages/relationships and are united due to neurotic motivations. The conclusions put forward, however, are almost certainly biased by the personal viewpoints of the researcher. For example, proponents for Jewish intermarriage in America contended that divorce was only a minor problem which could be attributed to family and community pressures and insufficient preparation of couples by rabbis. Moreover, there were an equivalent number of individuals who insisted that there was no relationship between intermarriage and family instability. For example, St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton made the following statement:

*There is, however, no evidence to indicate that the divorce rate is higher among the intermarried than in the population as a whole; indeed there is reason to think that the reverse may be true. The fact that they have violated a taboo together may well*

*act as an additional bond between interracial couples* (cited in Spickard, 1989, p. 327).

Maria and Daniel Levinson (1958-59) differentiated between intermarriages that developed from either neurotic or more conscious healthier motives. The former kind, which the Levinsons categorised as 'neurotic exogamy,' included Jewish men who intensely identified with Judaism, grew up immersed in a Jewish environment, and did not believe in intermarriage on principle. However, they proceeded to marry Gentile women as a result of their unresolved adolescent rebellion and mother fixations, and because of their failure to establish sexual relations with Jewish women. For them,

*... the Gentile woman represents, at a conscious level, the female who is antitheses of mother—someone who is devalued, morally inferior, and an object of carnal sexual wishes. Unconsciously, however, she represents the 'forbidden' mother on whom sexual impulses are fixated* (Spickard, 1989, p. 209).

The Levinsons labelled the second group who intermarried as 'emancipated,' as they made a conscious 'contrast choice' of mates. They also grew up within a prevailing Jewish environment and experienced a difficult adolescent rebellion. However, they resolved their rebellion by choosing to dilute their identity with Judaism. In effect, they assimilated into the secular society and lost their ties to Judaism long before they married so were already ideologically inclined to regard ethnic barriers as insignificant. Nonetheless, in a similar fashion to the neurotic subgroup they also had difficulties with domineering, suffocating mothers, and subsequently chose mates who did not resemble their mothers. The Levinsons' main reasons for distinguishing these intermarriages as healthy, as opposed to neurotic, were that the individuals in this group displayed less anxiety about themselves and had already denounced their Jewish connections prior to meeting their non-Jewish brides (Levinson et al., 1958-59).

Although intermarriages sometimes take place because of neurotic motivations, some researchers contended that they are not always bad marriages. For instance, while Samuel Glasner wrote in 1962 that psychotherapy might be a necessity for people considering intermarriage because there often are neurotic motives. He also noted that "not all mixed marriages stem from unhealthy motives," (cited in Spickard, 1989, p. 208). Abraham Franzblau observed a decade earlier that "sometimes mixed marriages,



even neurotic ones, solve problems, instead of creating them, when the unconscious needs of a couple meet and match,” (cited in Spickard, 1989, p. 208). He believed that other intermarriages may be completely healthy.

*[intermarriage may be healthy] when they are between emotionally mature people, who are deeply in love, who approach the relationship with mature understanding of the obstacles and responsibilities which such a marriage will place in their path, and who have sufficient character to face what it means not only for themselves but for their children (cited in Spickard, 1989, p. 209).*

Louis Birner confirmed Franzblau’s opinion:

*In situations where the Oedipus complex is resolved with some degree of health, Jews will tend to marry Jews ... [However] if an interfaith marriage can reduce the person’s sense of guilt and help both parties move in the direction of health it is a successful union (cited in Spickard, 1989, p. 209).*

In effect, literature presenting intermarriage in a favourable light is scarce. However, the few that exist highlight the positive and enriching elements, such as the broad opportunities for learning and growth; broad perspectives for children and, vitality in family life (Breger & Hill, 1998; Ho, 1990). The present study’s data reveals that there is little evidence for the negative assertions regarding intermarriage. Essentially, the women’s relationships with their Arab partner are enduring and divorce was uncommon. Similarly, results of the studies reviewed by Gaines et al. (2005) disprove the commonly held notion that interracial couples are at a statistically higher risk of separation than are intraracial couples (in the United States, approximately 2/3 of interracial marriages and 1/2 of intraracial marriages end in divorce; Gaines & Leaver, 2002). Data indicating higher divorce rates for mixed marriages generally were taken from older studies on Jewish intermarriage (Berman, 1968) and black-white marriages (Heer, 1966). The current study showed that there are differences between outsiders’ views (that these couples are doomed to failure) and the reality of the outlook for the unions’ success. The women in particular face unique problems when dealing with relationship outsiders (friends or family members who may oppose their relationships).

It is not clear whether opponents or supporters are correct in their contention that cross-frontier relationships/marriages suffer a higher divorce rate. Nevertheless, and echoing Wehrly et al.'s (1999) assertion that just as some same background relationships may succeed or fail on the basis of basic relationship processes (e.g. social exchange, interdependence), so too may some cross-frontier relationships succeed or fail on the basis of those same relationship processes.

*For the most part, the relational experiences of interracial couples mirror those of same-race couples; the areas of greatest stress and tension for these couples are typical of those found in most marriages (Wehrly et al., 1999).*

What is clear from the present study is that the relationships were resilient and remained intact over time. This study's data suggest that the couples stay together for the following reasons: self-actualisation, existential purpose, cultural enrichment, self-expansion, rebelliousness, sense of belonging, personal growth through adversity, personal optimism, ideology, and couple durability over time.

This section will investigate the possible benefits the women gained from their cross-cultural relationship. Previous research has found that people's self-views alter to fit the views of the person with whom they are romantically involved (Baldwin et al., 1990) and specifically, that romantic partners have a significant influence on people's views of their own personality characteristics (Aron et al., 1991). The women mapped out a matrix of their 'sense of self' in their narratives, depicting patterns and processes that they used to bring about a self-transformation. They adjusted well to outsiders' reactions to their relationship and the change in their environment. Indeed, the evidence suggests that it was the outsiders' reactions to their relationships that prompted the subjects in this study to begin a path towards self-development. In other words, outsiders' reactions provided these women with a self-reflective 'space' for mapping out a 'sense of self.' Some commonalities in themes emerged concerning what most of the women considered to be strengths, advantages, and rewards for marrying or being in a serious long-term relationship with their Arab partner. These themes were present despite the difficult times through which they lived. How do people, women in particular, cope with the lived experience of these differences—as an enrichment, a palate offering diversity and freedom to change, or as a feeling of cultural dispossession

and alienation? How do people negotiate any perceived gulf between Self and Other, or even Self constructed as Other in a foreign society?

### 8.1.1 *Self-actualisation*

Aron and Aron's (1986) work is in line with the women in the present study where people are attracted to those in whom they see the opportunity for self-expansion. The women who did not convert to Islam reported that one positive aspect of their involvement in the relationships was the fulfilment of their self-actualisation needs. This was noted both by those who immigrated to Israel and by the sabra women<sup>35</sup>. Many of the women who did not convert to Islam (11) reported that if they had not chosen to be with their Arab partner they would have chosen someone who was equally as challenging. The women's reasons for undertaking this type of relationship reflects how they understand themselves and the partners with whom they are likely to connect. This in turn relates to their views and concepts about relationships and love:

*I chose this marriage because ... I love the how, uh how much variety there is here, how interesting it is here, the challenge, I live for those experiences. I get bored when I hang out with people that are just like me. I want to be with some people like me because I want to feel at home but I also want to be with people who are really different and I want to surround myself with people who are uh challenging and that challenge me. And, so, it was that situation and there are parts of it that I just loved [Vanessa, Kibbutz].*

### 8.1.2 *Existential purpose*

The women who did not convert to Islam stated that their relationships gave them a sense of direction, a meaning and a purpose for living. The relationship itself answers the question: Why do you want such a relationship? What do you hope to obtain by entering that sort of relationship? From meaning and purpose they then go on

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<sup>35</sup> Sabra is a term which denotes a native-born Israeli.

to experience the higher states that give them a sense of inspiration, passion, hope, love, joy, and transcendence - the very qualities referred to as 'spiritual.'

### 8.1.3 *Cultural enrichment*

The women spoke of their relationships providing greater variation and vitality in their lifestyle because of their exposure to their partners' customs, ceremonies, and language. They felt that they had enriched their daily lives in ways which would probably not have been possible with someone from the same background. They reported that life with their partner was more interesting because it was varied and unpredictable.

*You need to be a curious person and I think marriage is very difficult. Being married to a person for many years, people like to change, people like new things, they keep buying things, getting a new channel on the TV, makes them excited. In a way it's against human nature to have the same man for so long. So, from that point of view, a person from a different culture keeps longer the interest in that way. It makes things easier from that point of view. You keep being surprised all the time. Routine is not that straight but uh you have to be a bit of a lonely man I suppose [Liat, Jerusalem].*

The women also describe how they aspired to adapt and learn the new culture. The challenges encountered are not seen as something hostile or to be rejected but rather as a challenge, often strange and difficult, that they want to overcome and learn.

Many of the women longed for the opportunity to experience greater variation and vitality in their lifestyle by being exposed to different customs, ceremonies, and languages. The women who did not convert to Islam were very explicit about this in their interviews. Likewise, while the women who converted to Islam didn't explicitly make note of this, it can be suggested that some of them also felt the same. The women who converted to Islam talked about learning about various aspects associated with their Muslim partner's ethnic and cultural identity. For example, they discussed learning how to speak Arabic, about the Qur'an and ways of praying, the Arab mentality,

behaviour/hospitality, celebrating Muslim holidays, preparing food in the Muslim way, and other aspects associated with being immersed within the Arab way of life.

*I don't think I would have learned their language [Arabic], I don't think I would have been involved in Arabic music and I think that I gained a whole cultural [Arab] world ... I, I went, went a very different direction, very different [Nina, Ramle].*

#### 8.1.4 *Self-expansion*

This meaning and purpose affords them with a sense of belonging, and subsequently, a sense of self-expansion. As previously mentioned, some literature cites and delineates a pessimistic view about mixed marriages (Lehrman, 1967; Little, 1942; Franzblau, 1954), and while many of the narratives did depict very obvious difficulties and challenges, the women who did not convert to Islam gave examples of being positively affected by their cross-frontier relationship. Their relationships gave them an opportunity to increase self-knowledge by being forced to reflect and define their own values, ideas and prejudices; that is, self-growth. The women who did not convert to Islam spoke of difficulties associated with having many of their assumptions and beliefs challenged but recognised that they gained because of the deliberation. They all felt that they were enriched and became more open minded because of their relationship experience. For them, their relationship affords them with a means to deal more effectively with their unresolved identity. Hence, it imparts them with a means for potential self-growth, that is, self-expansion. A healthy sense of self was developed, making them feel worthy, valuable, respectable and loveable. With a healthy sense of self the women who did not convert to Islam celebrated their relationships and valued themselves without putting their 'self' on the line of denigration or neglect. The themes of growth, development, and positive feelings due to adaptation and the undeniable deep, internal changes that occur as a result of their relationship, were clearly present.

*I didn't lose anything. I only gained from this experience ... Well, I think it's been one big learning experience in general. Specifically, I have learnt a lot of things about myself. I have learnt a lot of the unreasonable things about myself, how unreasonable I can be, and how hard I need to work on myself*

*for a change. I need to make a lot of changes on myself ...*

[Vanessa, Kibbutz].

What is attributed to their relationship may become an avenue to be re-integrated and more readily accepted as part of their self. There was the clear feeling that these women have been able to cope with the challenges and also develop feelings of competence and mastery.

*My plays feature mainly the Arab society ... if I wasn't living the way I am, I don't think I would have written about all these things, from a special place, from the specific place I am in [relationship] ... I gained a whole cultural [Arab] world ... I, I went, went a very different direction, very different. This means in things that I felt that I have problems so I wrote about them. I decided to understand them from the side of my writing. From the side of the ... from the side of the play writer and director ... if these are problems in the language and if this is problems to live together and if this ... so when I write it makes me feel loose, this makes me understand the different side like to live with the other side to adapt. This is what I do in my plays, and in some place this ... from some place this doesn't turn to be an issue that he is an Arab... [Sivan, Tel Aviv].*

Sivan came to see herself as the sum of dissociated selves, distributed through her screenwriting (a coping mechanism). Likewise, she was exposed to novel, different and legitimate ways of perceiving life and resolving problems. Her relationship gave her exposure to a different culture and cultural reference. Several of the women conveyed that their relationships offered them versatile and novel experiences.

Rituals of food and eating highlight an intriguing problem and conundrum arising from these relationships. Some women (three) reported that difficulties surfaced with different food preferences. This example is an implicit case of self-expansion and was made by a few of the women who converted to Islam. It may be speculated that learning how to cook for, and serve, their husband provided them with a means for self-expansion.

Related to the above is the idea that for the most part, the women in this study share common positive relationship features. For example, the women are given a chance to increase self-knowledge by being forced to examine and define their own values, ideas and prejudices, that is, self-growth. Three women who converted to Islam, and 14 women who did not convert to Islam, spoke of difficulties associated with having many of their assumptions and beliefs challenged but simultaneously admitted that ultimately they were strengthened because of the necessity of having to self-reflect. The women who converted to Islam didn't overtly assert this but it can be posited by the statements they made, such as the one below.

*It doesn't matter if he's a Jew or an Arab. It's a human being! I have no discrimination. We are all human beings, we all want the same things and it has nothing to do with religion. To have fun and to be happy together has nothing to do with religion or anything else. If someone has a problem with an interracial couple, then it is their problem. That is it; this is how we live ... You know it hurts me twice. I hurt twice for the Jews and again for the Arabs... [Sara, Jafa].*

#### 8.1.5 *Rebelliousness and sense of belonging*

One of the motives for intermarriages proposed by psychologist Ernest Porterfield (1982) was that an individual may enter intermarriage as a means for rebelling against a parent, usually a father. This theme resonated with some of the women in the present study, as it may be that some of their involvement in these relationships is by nature rebellious and non-conventional. It thereby frees them from participation in the conventionalism of their surrounding social group, creating a relationship that is very private. However, the women in the present study also express their sense of 'will' or choice for entering the relationships, as they were searching for something different than the norm. With meaning and purpose the women achieved a sense of belonging and their identity conflicts were resolved; the women reported their relationship being one where they could learn about their own inner characteristics (interests, attitudes, likes, dislikes, etc.). Hence, the relationship can be viewed as a workshop for self-discovery, a medium for enhanced self-analysis that helps them

understand how they construct themselves. The women are exploring, creating and recreating their concept of 'self' and their relationship with their surrounding world.

*So, there, as I said, I simply wanted to start looking for other Arab and Jewish couples, people who are not afraid of this situation because there are some people who hide, not everybody [Effy, Netanya].*

Moving up into this matrix allows an understanding and exploration of what the women really want, what they think they are going after and to check whether they are actually achieving their stated intentions.

#### 8.1.6 *Personal growth through adversity*

Underlying these narratives is the women's discourse about hope, of knowing that they have a future and that they will be able to succeed if they invest their time and energy properly. They talked of feelings of 'being stronger,' of feeling more 'confident.' They spoke proudly of the changes that have occurred—they are able to cope with previously insurmountable situations and they learnt to be responsible and to fight for what is important. There is a feeling of satisfaction these young people describe from overcoming challenges and difficulties.

*Yes, definitely, definitely this relationship made me stronger ... definitely has made me stronger. To fight for ... I think anything, uhm, not only in a relationship but anything that is difficult on a person, if it's a passing away of a parent or something that they have to uhm live through that is uhm hard, makes foot foot, you know. All the hard things in life, the way I see it now, all the hard things I have had to go through has only made me a better, stronger person. Uh hum. Definitely ... You learn to have, how do you say, like elephant skin, and uhm. And like I said before, that the uhm you also learn how and so I stay awake, I stay awake and I live my life the way I think. It's my life and I think it is ok [Yael, Haifa].*

Hence, some members reported that being ostracised by their families of origin helped to solidify their relationship. Connected to the feeling of success is a strong



sense of being at peace with oneself despite the difficulties and challenges *en route* to positive development. Most of the women (23) entered their relationships with lack of family support, as many described, and in their interviews they talk of coming to terms with themselves:

*First of all, what I gained from this relationship was to give an answer to my essence ... You need be very much at peace with yourself, to be very stubborn to be very much at terms with yourself. To, to believe what you are doing is good for you. Eh ... and it's not simple ... I learned to be at peace with myself*  
[Effy, Netanya].

The relationship offers a zone of reflection, teaching them important aspects about themselves. The gained knowledge can be rewarding and allows for self-progression. Knowledge is gained for improving one's real-life social skills and perception, enhanced self-esteem, and the opportunity to work out personal problems.

*Each day is a challenge; I must prove to myself my strength. I chose the more difficult path. I learn a lot about myself all the time. I test myself to the limits. My children teach me a lot* [Liora, Haifa].

This attitude leads them to make changes, to adapt, and to find the appropriate ways of coping with their environment. Each success enhances their sense of mastery and subsequent adaptive functioning.

*My son even tells me that not everything that happens to me is a reaction towards my mixed relationship. That I overreact and am too sensitive to what I think others intend by their actions. I take offence, maybe too sensitive and associate it with racist reactions that they may have towards me. My son is right. I may be incorrect sometimes. I am learning how to take things less seriously and try to deal with the problem in a less extreme way, without panicking. I am calmer now, more calm and confident*  
[Effy, Netanya].

#### 8.1.7 *Personal optimism*

Self- belief and positive optimism is one of the forces that motivates these women, and is possibly a unique female element in these cross-frontier relationships. The women believe in themselves and believe in their abilities to achieve inner peace. These women perceive the difficulties, differences and unfamiliar environment as inherently interesting; their relationship presents challenges that afford them with new surprises and an opportunity for learning and acknowledging different perspectives about life in general. They maintain that although their relationships may be a source of stress, these very facts are also very positive aspects of their relationships.

#### 8.1.8 *Ideology*

The women were able to sympathise with and feel for both sides, Arabs and Jews, thereby proclaiming a wider world-view. They felt that because they had exposure and experience to both cultures, they had acquired a more liberal and broad-minded perspective of the world. Another positive relationship outcome is being exposed to new and different ways of approaching life and resolving problems. They were able to choose alternative lifestyles and decide how they wanted to live their lives. The women suggested that a feeling of being pioneers in Israel was evoked through their relationships. They felt that their relationships almost acted as a prelude to an anticipated future in Israel- a state where cultural or religious differences would not be a cause for division. They hoped that their relationship could provide a sign of the breakdown of ethnocentrism and arbitrary in-group, out-group prejudice and misunderstanding that resulted in turmoil and tension between Jews and Arabs. Essentially, the women may have felt like 'citizens' of the world, a possible role of cultural mediator and that their relationships were models for a peaceful future in Israel.

#### 8.1.9 *Couple durability over time*

The women spoke of the feelings of success and achievement that can derive from their cross-frontier experience. For them, the fact that they face suffering builds character and renders strength to carry on confronting and overcoming any difficulties, in order that they continue to live to keep their family together. When this happens the process has been a fruitful one for the person concerned and she can now move forward again towards a greater wholeness and be more fully aware of her identity. In these cases, choosing an Arab partner does no great harm. The ability to express themselves

in new (and often multiple) ways is a vital component for these women, and it inevitably leads to better self-understanding. The interview provides a space for thinking about their relationship dynamics and can be considered an identity workshop, where people can reflect about themselves and their lives. This illustrates that the inclination of women who did not convert to Islam was to approach problems/conflicts confidently instead of using defensive tactics to avoid them (i.e. politics). For these women, the relationship offers them a means for self-actualisation, to meet their needs of realising their personal potential, self-fulfilment, seek personal growth and peak experiences. Furthermore, the sense of direction and benefits they obtained from their relationships secured them with a sense of purpose and belonging, an important element for what I believe to be self-resolution.

By challenging the status quo, these couple members may have a strong commitment towards each other and a desire for self-development. This, in turn, may lead to a deeper investment from both partners. Hence, the investigation and exploration of the strengths and rewards elicited by these durable cross-frontier relationships can impart wisdom and advice for others considering or involved in similar relationships. This knowledge may be particularly useful for relationship enhancement and/or maintenance. The women were able to identify an ongoing cultural adventure and principle rewards granted to them in their relationships with their partners. While locating positive benefits was more tangible for the women who did not convert to Islam, it may also be speculated that those that did convert to Islam also experienced and could identify with some of the positive benefits. In fact, it may be suggested that the conversion to Islam was a part of their radically expanding identity. In other words, their drastic change in religion and lifestyle may have given them an enhanced means for self-expansion.

Through analysis of the interview data the researcher came to believe that the processes involved in self-expansion were influenced by the distress, incompatibility, incompleteness, inconsistency, or confrontation the women experienced in response to the sensitive points of their relationship. The women's involvement in these relationships and the reactions of others are seen as the potential trigger for self-development. In other words, it served as a turning point for the women in which basic choices needed to be made regarding several areas of their lives. For example, primary decisions and commitments needed to be addressed about their current way of life and

an ideology had to be committed to, whether it be a Jewish or Arab identity, by which to live.

The relationships discussed in this study can provide an opportunity for self-expansion for the women, which may outweigh negative relationship aspects. How beneficial the relationships can be is also a function of the each woman's perspective. That is, not everybody can and will conduct self-diagnosis vis-à-vis his/her actions by being in the relationship. Also, it is not conceivable that they would necessarily do anything positive to improve their 'self.' In fact, dark sides of the self are sometimes (probably seldom) encouraged. Fourteen of the women who converted to Islam reported about their feelings of sensitivity especially in regards to their children. An American writer, Peter de Vries, maintained that "the value of marriage is not that adults produce children, but that children produce adults," (cited in Root, 2001, p. 163). Therefore, it may be that Daniella's son threatened the very identity she worked so hard to achieve.

*And the big one [son] is in the army. I didn't want it, I didn't agree. I never agreed. Why should he go to the army, what will everyone think here? What did I work for over the years? That they will be like everyone else exactly, 'That you will ruin this for me' ... I didn't want him to go to the army ... it's not possible to be eh between two worlds [Daniella, living in an Arab village].*

Only rarely will some of the women who converted to Islam (three) examine and challenge their own feelings in their relationship experiences. These women were perpetually in conflict but were searching and actively seeking information to form their sense of self in the midst of self-growth and development. They strived for consistency, coherence and harmony between their values, beliefs and commitments and simultaneously they were self-exploring and evaluating themselves. Amongst the convert subjects, Daniella, Naama, and Dana afforded striking examples of how unresolved and vulnerable inner conflicts may, over time, become an internal psychological battleground. For example,

*I have, I have fights between my mind and my heart. I try, to not eh try not to show my pain to the outside, you understand? It hurts, it's... look, it hurts from my side and from the other side.*

*It is confusion for the entire life* [Daniella, living in an Arab village].

Hence, these women openly stated that they constantly live in, endure and are entangled in perpetual conflicts resulting in a vicious escalating spiral of turmoil. Their Arab partner and his respective family and community serve as repository for the same vulnerable areas sensitised by unresolved conflicts. Furthermore, the relationships were used as a device to distance themselves from their family of origin and to distance an ill-defined something from the self. However, the very act of distancing allowed it to acquire definition, so that what has been attributed to their partners may later on be able to be re-integrated and more readily accepted as part of their self. Although none of the women who converted to Islam explicitly reported accounts of self-expansion I suggest that some of them also utilised their relationships as a means to work on personal vulnerable areas and a path towards self-expansion. In other words, their relationship acted as a catalyst to reformulate, and triggered a path towards a reaffirmation of, their identity.

These women continued to contemplate their inner feelings. As mentioned previously, they met and committed to their partner when they were adolescents, possibly trying to find a solution to any inner conflicts by marrying their Arab partner prior to discovering themselves completely. Over time, however, they realised that they were not satisfied and wanted more than their family, and the love that bound them to their husband. They began actively searching to find meaning for their life, to get to know themselves and come to terms with their fears and vulnerabilities. They realised that an intrinsic search for their meaning is more important than an extrinsic one. Hence, what distinguishes the selected women who converted to Islam from the others is that they have some commitment towards a self-expansion motive, reflecting a provisional form for completion and integration. This theme which emerged from the women's interviews is in contrast to Stonequist's (1937) view of mixed relationships. He contended that the relationships are not a positive move and that those involved are marginal individuals who failed to be a full member in either group. However, this view is certainly not the only one. Christine Iijima Hall, in her chapter in *Racially Mixed People in America*, deals with Stonequist's concept of the marginal man and quotes R. E. Park (Stonequist's teacher and the originator of the term 'marginal man') in the introduction to Stonequist's book:

*The fate which condemns him [the marginal person] to live, the same fate, in two worlds is the same which compels him to assume, in relation to the world in which he lives, the role of a cosmopolitan and a stranger. Inevitably he becomes, relative to his cultural milieu, the individual with a wider horizon, the keener intelligence, the more detached and rational viewpoint. The marginal person is always relatively the more civilised human being (Stonquist, 1937, xvii).*

Hall makes the interesting and reasonable point that such individuals are culturally enriched by their mixed heritage. Similar reports were found in the present study. The women's relationships may be considered another method of adding a new perspective to self-examination and analysis. Involvement in these relationships gave the women a means to extend their intra-physical world and by doing so, start to better understand themselves through self-exploration. The relationships allowed for an extension of themselves in ways previously not possible because their reflected thoughts, feelings, and emotions are projected, explained, and communicated with their open communication in the interviews. The relationships provided a space for them to formulate and reaffirm their identity. Furthermore, and as Spickard's (1989) summary posits, even if neurotic motives were present when individuals of different backgrounds first met, such factors disappeared as couples gradually got to know one another and eventually married (Spickard, 1989). Certainly, this seems a valid assertion for the women in the present study.

The women in the study have patterns and processes they used in order to deal with the world around them. The skills and the resources they used to develop and utilise their potentials and capacities are numerous and they have an inner strength that they used to bring about self-transformation, building a map of their self. This sense of power or resourcefulness impacted dramatically on how they responded to outsiders' attitudes towards them. It's the difference between learned helplessness (which was exemplified by a few very religious converts to Islam) and learned optimism (for a few of those that did and did not convert to Islam), between reactivity and passivity and assertive actions. A healthy sense of self enabled the women to feel self-efficacy and to take ownership of their lives. It's the foundation for persistence, determination, resiliency, passion, and pro-activity in their daily lives.

As mentioned previously, a person's background provides the context in which relationship dynamics are played out. Seen in this light, each background contributes to an individual's identity and self-concept, whereby from this core sense of self, relationship-related processes take place. Hence, the theme of contextual influences on personal relationship processes should be mentioned again here, and particularly related to ethnicity where ethnicity should be explored fully, as a multidimensional, multifaceted influence on the women's relationship processes. The women's primary responsibility for childbearing and child rearing makes them central to any discussion of cross-frontier relationships and ethnicity. Although ethnic group membership has important psychological implications for individuals, the nature of the relationships among different forms of cultural identity and relationship outcomes is complex.

## **8.2 Factors for success**

The women in the current study were also unique on another point: compared to Jewish-Jewish couples in Israel they indicated having higher quality relationships on the Israeli relationship quality questionnaire. Their relationships were durable and lasting. Some of the women in the present study seemed to be happier and in better relationships than others. Some, however, appeared to be struggling to grow. Yet, all of the women in the study stayed in their relationships. The strength and/or weakness of their relationships were essentially a personal matter. What seems to be a salient issue here is that the couple dynamics depended on the two people involved in the relationship, and was not a factor of the individual cultures, religions and/or ethnicities involved. Literature suggest that relatively few allow for the possibility that people who marry outside their racial or socioeconomic or gender group do so for the same reasons that people marry within their group (Root, 2001, p. 65).

Karney and Bradbury's (1995), as well as Gottman's (1993) stress the importance of conflict management techniques in married couples. The ways in which individuals manage the life events they encounter contribute to the couple's perceptions regarding the quality of their marriage. Given that cultural background differences can often cause difficulties in couples' lives and add extra stress to their relationships, awareness of these differences may help them understand one another better. However awareness alone is not sufficient. The points posited by Karney and Bradbury and Gottman may also be relevant for the women in this study; the coping mechanisms and

adaptive processes that they use to navigate their world- verbal and nonverbal communication, to manage their differences and to resolve the challenges they encounter- are significant. Often their ability to confront these conflicts depends on the strength of their self-concept and how they perceive themselves and also depends on the degree of social support which validates all aspects of their being. An extensive amount of literature makes note of the strengths associated with being a person of mixed-race heritage, including a positive sense of uniqueness, an ability to negotiate, relate to, and enjoy diverse groups of people, greater sensitivity, awareness, and understanding of differences, as well as adversity that may be associated with being different (Root, 1996; Wehrly et al., 1999). These same characteristics may be relevant for cross-frontier couple relationships. For instance, some of the women in the present study shared similar characteristics to that found in Romano's (2001) model for successful cross-frontier relationships. Specifically, his model includes 10 elements which are the following: a commitment to the relationship, an ability to communicate, sensitivity to each other's needs, a liking for the other's culture, flexibility, a solid, positive self-image, love as the main marital motive, common goals, a spirit of adventure, and a sense of humour. These characteristics were portrayed in the study's interviews to varying degrees, as some were explicitly described while others could be inferred from the interviews. Several of the women emphasised one or two of the points which they considered essential to their own relationships, while others had difficulty attaining some of the characteristics. A few of the women claimed all of the factors but the more satisfied couples appeared to share enough of these characteristics to sustain a lasting and enduring marriage while they worked on the remaining ones.

### 8.2.1 *Commitment to the relationship*

All of the women reported, directly or indirectly, that they were committed to making their relationship work at any cost. They refused to reflect on their past, did not regret their decision to enter their relationship, and accepted their present day life for what it was. The women seemed to have a high degree of tolerance for any differences and difficulties they encountered.

*Of course, a person that suffered a lot in her life ... not everyone is prepared for this. You understand? I didn't allow my children to suffer as much as I did. I survive a lot suffering, you*



*understand? ... so that my children won't suffer like I suffered*  
[Sara, living in an Arab Village].

Six women made it clear that they were more accepting of imperfections or failures than couples from the same background. All the women interviewed in the present study eventually compared their relationships to those paired couples who were from the same background, namely Israeli Jewish-Jewish and Arab-Arab relationships. According to them, any marriage, regardless if the couple is formed from individual's from the same background, has the potential for problems, divorce and arguments, and requires a lot of work and effort to hold it together.

Their commitment to their relationships seemed to be strengthened by pride, to make a declaration to those in their immediate and wider social circle. It also seems that some of the women may have looked at the outside consequences of their relationship as well as inside their relationship for fulfilment. All of these relationships took place against the will of either their families and some of their friends. This may have resulted in their determination to make their relationships even more durable. In fact it can be speculated that this determination became one of the driving forces keeping their relationships together regardless of any differences and difficulties they experienced. These women never lost sight of this primary goal and were dedicated to it so much so that they endured any obstacles or struggles for the sake of their new family. The women appeared to need to prove to everyone (sometimes themselves included) that they made the right decision, not wanting to admit to their critics that they might have made a mistake.

*I don't speak at all about the difficulties. When we have a problem I don't speak with my parents. I don't want them to get involved with this. Because later they will say, 'You see, we told you that it wouldn't work out and that he isn't the man for you.' I don't want them to tell me 'we told you so.' So I don't get them involved. I want to show them that I am well, that I am managing well ... that everything is ok* [Gavriella, Jaffa].

Some of the women (23) also acknowledged that a supportive family and an accepting society would have made their relationships easier. However, since most of

the women lacked this support it often encouraged them to feel stronger about their partner, enabling their relationship to be stronger and more resilient.

Most of the women (26) seemed to be reluctant to renounce the new identity and interrelated recognition they received because of being in a relationship with an Arab partner. In other words, they acquired a sense of being special and unique because of their relationships, so much so that it would have been difficult for them to return to their previous status—that of being just like everyone else (marrying someone from their own background). This may have been especially relevant for those women who felt the need to be different, and who perhaps were escaping something they didn't like in their own culture by marrying out of it. According to Root (1994), uniqueness crosses over into other areas expressed by multiracial individuals where they often perceive themselves as being 'different' from others, based upon being treated as though they are unique or special because of their multiracial status. Time and again, the same motives which may have led some of the women in the present study to enter their relationships in the first place may have remained a dominant driving force they utilised and referred to when they confronted relationship obstacles.

In many cases (26) the women were rebelling against the status quo by entering these relationships. Comparable to other studies (Romano, 2001), the women in the present study made a lifelong commitment to their statements of protest, challenging the norm.

### 8.2.2 *Ability to communicate*

The women mentioned that being able to communicate with their partner was a positive feature of their relationship. All of the women who converted to Islam knew their partner's language, Arabic. Proficiency in Arabic provided them a means for integration within the Arab majority community in the Arab neighbourhood of a mixed town or the Arab village where they resided. The women who converted to Islam seemed to intuitively know that they could never really know their partner, accepted by others, and be immersed in his culture and way of life unless they learned his language. For them, this was an essential part of fully immersing themselves in their spouse's lifestyle.

The women who did not convert to Islam also articulated specific communication patterns, albeit in different ways. They asserted that they were very expressive in their communication patterns with their partners, having lengthy discussions regularly. More importantly, however, they learned to communicate openly about sensitive issues, such as politics in Israel, with their partners. They did not withhold any of their opinions and views and communicated them freely and openly, if not always comfortably. Hence, the women's diverse communication patterns highlight that this factor is an essential feature for their relationship endurance and longevity.

### 8.2.3 *Sensitivity to each other's needs*

The women's stories implied sensitivity on behalf of both partners whereby they were able to feel, perceive and respond to outside stimuli, that is, their partner's emotional, physical, personal, or cultural needs. For example, sensitivity was manifested when the women's partners expressed concern and sympathy for them.

*There are days like this, moments the distance from my family hurts me. He leaves me. He tells the children 'don't bother your mother, she wants to rest.' I go to sleep, you know, in order to wake up and to have a new start. That's it. It was and it passed. Like, during the holidays, the TV holiday advertisements and shows and he says, 'ooof, change the channel already.' I don't want to see it. Inside, it's emotional for me and reminds me of the past and you remember that you are quite cut off from the family. And there ... Listen, no matter how good it is for me, and, but always the family is missing [Naama, Jaffa].*

Their spouses were able to empathise with the profound feelings evoked from cutting the ties with their family of origin and with their cultural traditions. For the women who converted to Islam, sensitivity was evident in their cross-cultural awareness and empathy; in these cases, they learnt to understand (if not share) their partner's values, beliefs, and needs and comprehend their spouse's interpretation of his life. For example, some of them dressed in the traditional Muslim style.

The women who converted to Islam respected their partner's desire for her conformity, at least in public, to his lifestyle and view of life (customs of his religion).

This feature was also echoed in the interviews with the women who did not convert to Islam, albeit in different ways; they reported being respectful about one another's desire to celebrate Jewish alongside Muslim holidays and for each partner to retain his and her identity.

However, it should be noted that this characteristic wasn't always present. For example, in one instance one woman depicted herself as feeling doomed with struggles and with her questions and feelings of ambivalence because her husband wasn't attentive to her needs. According to Gavriella [Jaffa], her partner never appreciated the sacrifices she made in her attempts to make the relationship work, to acculturate, and therefore felt that her inability proved her to be an unfit wife. She insinuated that her partner was not compassionate and was not able to step out of his own skin long enough to see what she really wanted and needed from him. It may be postulated that her relationship is one which is threatened and/or is in danger of divorce.

#### 8.2.4 *A liking for the other's culture*

The women did not have to be fully accepting of everything in their partner's culture but they did need to like enough of their partner's culture to be able to accept or ignore the elements that they disliked. This is similar to other studies where women felt that converting and assimilating into their husband's Muslim way of life provided them with social respect (Roer-Strier & Ezra, 2006). The women talked about the feelings they believed they acquired through their marriages/relationships. They enjoyed the idea that they were somewhat out of the ordinary, the centre of attention, in both their own and in their spouse's community. Obviously, there were downsides and negative aspects associated with their relationships (e.g. 'not belonging,' racist incidents, etc.). Nevertheless most felt that their relationships/marriages gave them a status which they enjoyed. For example, 14 of the women who converted to Islam repeatedly mentioned and made it clear that they revered the respect they received from their partner's Arabic community.

*For them it's respect, respect when a Jewish woman enters the Islam community, I have more respect than with them [Jews] ... I feel, like, I give them more respect than another person ... It's not the same with the Jews, its respect for a woman here [Tali, Jaffa].*

Without some liking of their Arab partner's culture, there would be an underlying separation between the partners. Equally important was that the Arab partner also respected the cultural origins of those women who did not convert to Islam. Human beings are all products of their respective cultures, and, if one partner criticises or denigrates the other's nationality, religion, or way of life, an underlying contempt will, to a large extent, always separate them. The women who did not convert to Islam were able to remain in their relationships while simultaneously maintaining their identity—each partner granted the other the opportunity to celebrate his/her traditions freely.

#### 8.2.5 *Flexibility*

Another relationship success factor for the women who converted to Islam was their ability to adapt their daily lives immersed in their Arab partners' culture and way of life. They made the necessary superficial adjustments of dressing in a certain way, cooking in a certain way, and studying and becoming fluent in their partner's language if they did not know it beforehand. Likewise, they adapted to their spouse's ways of socialising, his concept of time orientation, and basic Muslim courtesy (being a good host, etc.). For the women who converted to Islam, they may have preferred their own ways, but nonetheless adapted. The ability to be flexible and adapt is a salient feature for the maintenance of their relationship. However, at the same time, flexibility for some of the women who converted to Islam was a double-edged sword; they experienced a psychological battleground regarding their Jewish-Arab identity confusion.

Flexible women who did not convert to Islam were open and interested in learning about their partner's culture. Some of these women reported taking time and making the effort to understand their partner's culture; they were open to trying out different behaviours in their own lifestyle.

Flexible women in the study were also found able to tolerate confusion and feelings of hurt induced by outsiders' attitudes and reactions towards their cross-frontier relationship. Flexibility was an essential component adding to the longevity of their cross-frontier relationship. It denotes being able to adjust and be open to trying something new and different, being willing to consider that there might be a valid alternative to the way one is used to doing or seeing things.

#### 8.2.6 *Solid positive self-image*

Flexibility requires a person to have a strong sense of self-worth as people who lack this feel threatened by nonconformity and risking an unknown undertaking. It may thus be posited that some of the women had enough self-confidence before entering their relationship to be able to handle the many ambiguities they would encounter. The extent to which the women valued themselves is highly debatable but the fact that some of the women converted to Islam and entered a foreign world may reflect this characteristic. The same may be argued for the women who did not convert to Islam where they described feeling different in one way or another from their fellow nationals who married people from similar backgrounds. Furthermore, they highlighted the fact that even when partners were from the same background it did not necessarily imply a good relationship. Finally, those women who eventually expressed self-acceptance, accepted their relationships and managed to grow alongside their partner despite, and possibly due to, their differences.

#### 8.2.7 *Love*

*[S]ince love is considered the noblest motive for marriage, many people will profess love even though they have married for different reasons, family pressure, for instance, of material security or betterment of status (Biegal, 1951, p. 332.)*

It is maintained that love is ‘the noblest motive,’ and functions as a ‘panacea’—as a bond to unite the couple to overcome problems. In other words, love has the potential to ‘conquer all’ (Greenfield, 1965). This idea that love is comparable to a ‘panacea’ may be especially salient for cross-frontier intermarriage. Reference to love being a significant motive for the women entering the Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships and for relationship longevity was evident from the present study’s women’s accounts. Many of the informants (28) explicitly quoted romantic love as a factor for success in their relationships/marriages. Love is vital for their relationship maintenance and their relationship remained intact over the years: “Love is a very very difficult thing, like it overrides a lot of things, even a community,” [Dana, Jaffa]. The theme of love was also illustrated in Root’s (2001) and Porterfield’s study (1978) where interracial couples reported entering marriage for the same reasons that motivated other couples—first and foremost love. The significance of love in relation to cross-frontier

relationships has been termed 'the romantic complex' (Goode, 1959). Essentially, this implies that intermarried couples constantly fight against difficulties encountered (e.g. society's prejudices), for the sake of love (Benson, 1981, p. 11). An interesting point was made by Root (2001) when she posited that love is the quiet revolution of interracial marriage (Root, 2001).

#### 8.2.8 *Goals*

Most of the women (13) who converted to Islam had their ties with their family of origin severed, resulting in their determination to make their relationships with their Arab partners and respective new families all the more durable. In fact, it can be speculated that this determination became one of the driving forces keeping their relationships together. These women never lost sight of this primary goal, so they endured any obstacles or struggles for the sake of their new family.

Some of the women (four) who did not convert to Islam had the primary motive of proving an ideological point as the main motive for entering their relationship. These women were also prepared to discard whatever threatened their relationship such as old friends that frowned upon their new relationship. It may be suggested that their goal and dedication to their relationship ensured its endurance over time.

#### 8.2.9 *Spirit of adventure*

The women in the study shared a common characteristic: a spirit of adventure and curiosity about the world. The women suggested that they didn't intentionally set out to find an Arab partner but after meeting their partner they were open to the idea of marrying and ready for the adventure of it. Yet three of the women who did not convert to Islam also recognised that their own personalities made it possible.

*I never fitted within the norm nor wanted to and so I enjoy the relationship. I like being different. I like experiencing new things [Liat, Jerusalem].*

Twelve of the women who did not convert to Islam said they were seeking more from life than the ordinary, something that would afford them with a feeling of 'living life on the edge.' In fact, they abhorred dullness; they reported that they were easily bored by the mundane, familiar routine and sought out the company of a wider range of

people. For them, marrying outside their background provided them with diversity and a sense of adventure, something they could not have gotten from a partner of their own background. Their spirit of adventure also helped them to overcome possible painful in-law visits, different foods, and different customs that may be difficult to accept. Many of the women (eight) also acknowledged the twists of destiny which brought them and their partner together,

*Everything is by chance. Yes. I say this is the destiny, the luck ...  
That's all, the destiny, love ... Yes. I say this is the destiny, the  
luck ... He is a good man. There aren't problems. I didn't look at  
community ... There, there isn't anything to do. It's destiny*  
[Moria, living in an Arab Village].

The same spirit that may have influenced their entry into their relationships was something that continued and stayed with them throughout their relationships and married lives. It helped them confront the difficult and unexpected events, which can accompany such a relationship. This sense of adventure, when coupled with other stable characteristics, served them well through some of the more challenging moments of their marriages. For example, the majority of the women were rightly saddened by the threats made by their families to keep them from marrying their Arab partners. However, their spirit of adventure facilitated their entry into their relationship, in some cases cutting off ties with their family of origin both physically and spiritually, and stepping into the new and totally different world albeit while still living in Israel.

The women portrayed their relationships in a variety of ways, ranging from good or bad, difficult or fun, stressful or easy, complicated, unpredictable, and so forth. They stressed, however, that at least their relationships were never boring.

#### 8.2.10 *Sense of humour*

Humour may act as another catalyst ensuring durability in their relationship. The couples (four of them) who find humour in everything, especially themselves and their negative experiences they had endured, lessened some of the tension they felt between themselves in their relationship. Humour was also an indication that they held a sense of optimism regarding their relationship, as if to say, 'As long as I can laugh about our weaknesses and difficulties, all is well.'



*It's a very difficult place. It's a very difficult place. And we make a lot of jokes about eh Jews, Arabs. We laugh about this eh, this means, we are in a phase like this where we can say things like this and then no one will be insulted. Because sometimes my husband will tell me, 'What, you don't know the Jewish people, how difficult it is,' and things like this. So he laughs and I don't say this even in hatred and not in ... on the contrary, simply because essentially in what, what, with who we live with and where we live [Effy, Netanya].*

Having a sense of humour may have also given the women and their partners a point whereby they could stop and consider their relationship. It may have reminded them about what keeps them together in the face of relationship obstacles and/or differences. Similar to sentiment felt by other individuals in any intimate relationship, some of these women stated that laughing at and building up a repertoire of funny incidents and having private jokes with their partner, such as in the quote given above, was a good way for them to cope with their lives. It may have also reminded them that they entered the marriage/relationship because it provided a space where they would be able to have fun, not only for all the serious things that attracted them. Therefore, in some instances, the researcher suggests that humour was associated with positive experiences in their marriage.

Overall, the women's adaptive processes result from the interface between their enduring vulnerabilities (e.g. personal strengths and weaknesses) and the type and severity of the life events they encounter (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). The women's ability to deal with difficult or stressful circumstances, and, at times chronic exposure to stressful events, will alter their perceptions about the quality of their relationship. Successful adaptation and coping mechanisms (e.g. the ways in which the women think about their relationship/marriage) will strengthen or support their relationship. This in turn will reduce the probability of their marital/relationship dissolution. Hence, life events may have both a negative or positive influence depending on the strength of the couple's adaptive processes (Halford, 2000). Gottman (1993) posited that if a couples positive interactions surpass any negative ones by at least 5:1 then their marriage can be regarded as relatively stable and categorised as being 'regulated.' Although some of the women may have felt mixed emotions concerning their relationships, their adaptive

processes (e.g. positive and enriching elements, enhanced tolerance, understanding and respect, etc.) might have outnumbered their negative ones resulting in a strong and enduring relationship with their Arab partner.

This study has highlighted that affection can alleviate conflict, and these conflicts are resolved by diminishing in intensity over time or losing the ability to arouse strong emotion. Various factors that were once important may diminish over time. The necessity to settle every issue is downplayed as one grows older, and priorities and behaviour change (Parker, 2002). This may be relevant to the women in the present study where Arab-Jewish differences may have once been important, yet became almost invisible with the passing of time, as they are superseded by the genuine concerns involved in any marriage.

### **8.3 Relationship Quality: Types of Cross-Frontier Marriages**

The previous sections discussed possible reasons for the women's relationship endurance and factors for success. Despite the fact that each woman has their own distinctive narratives features, most of the stories they tell highlight the same basic human elements of feelings of success and achievement that one can derive from being in such romantic relationships.

This section will consider the various ways in which the women in the present study dealt with differences in their relationship with their Arab partner. Before doing so, it should be noted that the following is not a blueprint for success for all women involved in such relationships, as each one is unique and specific to its own relationship dynamics; what may work well and is successful for one woman may not be feasible or successful for another woman. Romano (2001) put forward three types of intercultural marital models, namely the submission/immersion, compromise, and consensus marital models. These models describe the various ways couples handle differences within their marital units and were adapted for the purposes of this study. The women described their relationships in such a way that they conform to either one or a combination of the three types of marital models.

### 8.3.1 Submission/Immersion

The most dominant (15/29) marital model for handling cultural differences was one where the participant converted to Islam. The women who converted to Islam submitted to and immersed themselves in the culture of their Arab partner, almost completely abandoning or denying their own Jewish identity in the process. The women in these cases moved into their Arab partner's village or Arab neighbourhood in a mixed town and submitted to his religion and culture. It should also be pointed out that in all the cases of conversion it is the woman who submitted to her partner's religion and culture. Hence, the study's findings agree with the literature (Romano, 2001) that posits that much of the time it is the woman who defers to the man's culture, especially if it she who either moves to his country, is much younger, or is insecure in her own identity. In addition, and in line with research relating to conversion age (Gillespie, 1991), these women converted when they were very young (adolescence), at an age where individuals are still vulnerable regarding their own identity. Hence, they may have been more drawn to and able to identify with their partner's culture as a means to secure a sense of identity. Or, perhaps they wanted to escape their own cultural background because of a bad childhood experience.

The factors influencing conversion to Islam were investigated to provide a more in-depth understanding to each particular case. For example, the message of Islam first reached these women through their boyfriends, yet they made it clear that their partners never forced them to convert to Islam, pray or go to the mosque.

*Yes. I converted to Islam for the children. I said that we should if we live in one village ... If I was to live, for example, in Kfar Saba or Tel Aviv, that's something different. But, if I live with him in one village, so we need, the wife goes according to her husband's religion so that the children will be in a good situation at school and so that the children in their class won't tell them that their 'mother is a Jew and your mother, and your mother,' so that they will be only one judgment. You understand? ... It was for me ... it wasn't for anything else, only for the children so there would be one religion, not two. They would be confused otherwise [Sara, living in an Arab village].*

According to these participants, they converted of their own free will yet were also influenced by external circumstances, namely for the sake of their children and the family. The women felt that the children they had or planned to have would be better off growing up and living in the village, or the Arab part of a mixed town, that is, Jaffa, where they would have one identity, rather than in Jewish society, where they would be torn between two. This is in line with existing literature (Romano, 2001), which states that these women believe that conversion to Islam and immersion in their husband's lifestyle creates a clear identity for their children, making them feel 'rooted and secure.' The women reflected this responsibility in their accounts and voluntarily made the decision to convert to Islam. Another factor highlighted by previous research (Romano, 2001) and consistent with the findings here is that the women who converted to Islam believed that submitting to the husband's Islamic culture was the best and perhaps only way for their marriage to survive, to reduce any cultural conflict for the 'sake of the family.' For them, this move reduces cultural conflict. The women's proficiency in Arabic and their new lifestyle became a part of the experience of conversion to Islam, providing them with a new definition of identity and personality.

The women attempted to find clarity between their former and new identities. They illustrated a break and turning away from their past and former habits and took to practising the new rituals immediately, forgetting elements of their former lives. The vignette below reflects Tali's [Jaffa] narrative where she is not able to express herself in Hebrew. This seems like an indication about her subjective shape of her speaking being that emerges alongside her new identity.

*No. How do you say? Eh both of us, we were partners. He, has  
ehhh, something to say to me, but how do you say it in  
Hebrew ... how do you explain, I don't know... [Tali, Jaffa].*

Through the process of learning another language, she forgot how to convey her thoughts in Hebrew, her mother tongue, undoubtedly an important element related to her former Israeli Jewish identity. Perhaps their impetus and ability to speak Arabic allowed them to cope in their relationship and/or different surroundings. Furthermore, the religion of Islam regulated their behaviours and proved functional for them. For them, this was the best means for them to cope and to live within their relationship, one which allowed their relationship to survive and endure over time. Furthermore, child-

rearing conflict was avoided. The women were exposed to the Arab culture living in Arab villages and Arab sections of a mixed town so much so that it was a dominant and exclusive factor that didn't allow for other alternatives.

However, despite the women's assertions that this was the best option for them it also afforded them many disadvantages. For example, a person is never totally successful at denying or losing his or her ethnic identity, though outwardly adhering to another (Romano, 2001). People do not suddenly and completely change their viewpoints and perspectives, meaning you cannot erase the core of your being simply by making an outward change in your religion and marrying a partner from a different culture.

*Yes. I, the truth is ... the truth is that I didn't want to convert to Islam. Because in every person there is this thing that it's his origin that he is born with and it stays with [Dana, Jaffa].*

Hence, the women's accounts reflect the previous findings in the literature, indicating that women cannot erase their childhood and previous identity completely, and, even if they try to, they often find themselves living with contradiction and confusion. They may find themselves outwardly supporting a value which they essentially do not agree with, submission being merely superficial for public appearance. These same women may also face different internal feelings such as certain resentment for things which they have sacrificed, like family and previous cultural identity.

*... I try not to talk about this outside. You understand? I try, to not eh try not to show my pain to the outside, you understand?*  
[Daniella, living in an Arab village].

The women may ignore their roots or cut them off by converting to Islam, speaking Arabic, and having no relations with their families and social background. However, they do so at a terrible price and they experience an internal psychological battleground. The women who fall under this marital model sacrificed their ethnic heritage. To quote Austrian artist/poet Friedensreich Hundertwasser, "If we do not honour our past, we lose our future. If we destroy our roots, we cannot grow" (from the wall of Friedensreich Hundertwasser Haus in Vienna, quoted from Romano, p. 173).

The immersion relationship model has one partner who is inflexible (i.e. takers). The Israeli Jewish woman had to change herself to adjust to her husband's lifestyle. For example, the women who converted to Islam learned to use domestic pampering towards their spouse, which he required as an expression of her love. In addition, the Jewish women performed an extreme 'act of giving' for the sake of their children and future family. She is the relationship member that does the giving for the survival of the relationship, the changing, and the adjusting in marriage.

It is commonly contended that cross-frontier relationships are an important index of ethnicity. One pivotal point worth mentioning here is that the submission/immersion marital model may relate to the previous discussion about ethnicity. These women identify themselves and are identified as a member in their husband's community (family, neighbours, etc.), rejecting their previous Jewish identity and culture. In other words, the women exemplified a turning away from their childhood upbringing and their previous reference of identity.

Similar to Erikson's (1966) postulation, their new Muslim ethnic identity is one which they use to locate themselves in their world and holds them together within the greater Muslim community. The women's new ethnicity provided them with a few new identities. For them, their new ethnic identity is a salient factor of their new lives. Ethnicity as being mainly about culture where the main interest is ethnic behaviour is also relevant to this group of women. This is defined by the women speaking a common language, eating the same food, disciplining their children in a similar way, expressing the same values, and their cultural practices (the holidays they choose to celebrate). Hence, the women's main strategy in this marital mode is an acculturation based on assimilation into her partner's local cultural and religious life. Hence, ethnic identity becomes a fundamental aspect of the women's social identity. It encompasses more than race and common ancestry; it refers to people in the same culture sharing beliefs, ways of communicating, attitudes, values, and behavioural norms (Keefe, 1992).

Gordon's (1964) classic '*Assimilation in American Life*' put forward the assumption that intercultural marriage is the principle step resulting in assimilation. According to this assumption, members of a minority group lose their ethnic and religious identities, and assimilate into the majority culture by intermarrying within the dominant group. This is true to some extent for the Jewish women who converted to

Islam in the present study. In their case, the women from the Jewish majority in Israel come to lose their Jewish ethnic and religious identity and assimilate into their husband's Muslim sector (Arab village or an Arab neighbourhood of a mixed town). They adopted an assimilated cultural adaptation pattern where they were absorbed into and completely engaged in new cultural practices, entirely adopting Islamic culture. The women in this marital mode adopted a range of strategies to relate to their new environment, to gain social acceptance, and to reduce marginality. These strategies range from total embracement of the local cultural and religious life to changing other behaviours to fit into the local society. In line with other findings in the literature (Roer-Strier & Ezra, 2006), six major strategies were evident that influenced the degree of their assimilation into their spouse's local culture. These areas include (a) knowledge of the Arabic language, (b) changing the style of dress, (c) adoption of socially assigned family and parental roles, (d) conversion to Islam, (e) adoption of local beliefs and values, and (f) modifying childrearing ideologies and practices according to the local customs.

However, Gordon's assimilation theory, which claimed that intermarriage is the ultimate litmus test of assimilation, was opposed by Steven Cohen (1988). Cohen (1988) argued that intercultural marriage is a sign of acculturation into the dominant host culture, an inevitable consequence of pluralism and social tolerance, which does not necessarily lead to assimilation and to the loss of religious and ethnic identity. The present study's data suggests variability as well as additional influences on adaptation patterns (i.e. Israel's political environment). Considering that different cultural adaptation strategies were found among the women and their partners, this study challenges Gordon's (1964) model and shows that intermarriage does not necessarily lead to assimilation (Cohen, 1988). In this case, the women's partners (those couples which fall under the compromise and consensus marital model, as described in the next sections) primarily acculturated into the dominant Jewish way of life and lived within the Jewish sector in Israel. The male partners, however, did not lose their Muslim identity as they continued to identify themselves as Muslim men and celebrate the Muslim holidays to different extents. In other words, the Arab male spouses retained their ethnic and religious identity. Hence, the Israeli case is distinctive and not easily

comparable to Gordon's theory; Gordon's findings are less applicable to Israeli Jewish & Arab cross-frontier couples than to those in the USA<sup>36</sup>.

Finally, and as mentioned previously, the concept of an ethnic identity is neither simple nor precise. For instance, it has been suggested that one's Jewish ethnic identity is composed of both cultural and spiritual components (Herman, 1989), where Jewish spiritual identity is described by performing Jewish rituals and following Jewish rabbinical traditions. Although a few of the women who converted to Islam had a religious Jewish upbringing, they may have not had a spiritual connection and felt a spiritual identity to Judaism such that converting to Islam was not such a symbolic move. In the present study, most of the women seemed to maintain a Jewish cultural identity. For them, their Jewish spiritual identity was less prevalent. If the women felt a spiritual Jewish identity, conversion and this marital model may have resulted in a tremendous amount of difficulties and negative repercussions.

### 8.3.2 *Compromise marital/relationship model*

Eleven of the women who did not convert to Islam in the present study reported managing cultural differences with their Arab partner by compromising. They gave up certain aspects of their culture, or made some adjustments, for their partner while their partner made some adjustments to be with them. In theory this may appear like a good solution as it implies flexibility and fairness, equality, openness, which are salient elements for successful cross-frontier relationships (Romano, 2001). This is especially so since the women didn't give up their identity, that is, they did not convert to Islam albeit being involved in a relationship with an Arab Islamic partner. However, the extent of success of compromise is debatable as other difficulties may arise if the women compromised more than they could cope with. If this happens and differences exist, then problems still arise. For example, Jasmine, whom lives in an Arab village,

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<sup>36</sup> The extent to which these findings are gendered is uncertain. For example, no consideration of Israeli Arab Muslim women was made in the present study because, as mentioned previously, they are prohibited from marrying non-Muslim men. Furthermore, as pointed out earlier (p. 7), no Israeli Arab Christian women in relationships with Israeli Jewish men were included in the present study. due to the infrequency of, and consequently difficultly in finding, such couples.



did not convert to Islam but compromised on her place of residence for her partner. This essentially resulted in her unhappiness and is consistent with Al-Agailai's (1992) findings which suggested that a failure to conform to the identity of the majority group would result in one's experience of social isolation and a sense of exclusion from the community.

*I was going with in my hands and this girl, a kid, a kid that just stood there and threw stones at me; she was talking not nice and started stoning me. It broke me down. I thought I was going to kill her ... I was with a kid in my hands and I don't have the language to talk back and I was shaking all over. I was so hurt, so so hurt [Jasmine, living in an Arab village].*

She lived in an Arab Muslim village near her husband's immediate family. She discredited his family and desired privacy and distance from them. In addition, she yearned to move to the city. Jasmine came to feel like an outsider in her husband's village and with his family. Her sacrifice and compromise were greater than the advantage of keeping her Jewish identity intact. This notion seems to be reflected by Romano (2001) whereby he stated that individual's in intercultural marriages often feel ostracised: "now, you're with the man you've always wanted in a place you do not belong," (Romano, 2001, p. 69).

*I kept my own identity. I mean, I never converted to become Muslim; he never converted to be a Jew. That way it is possible, really is. Look, I live in the Arab village, living my own way. Yes, so it is true that I am not happy, it is not really my environment, and I am bored, but it is possible... [Jasmine, living in an Arab village].*

Jasmine felt like a foreigner in her place of residence and consequently her individual identity, as well as perceived social support, was threatened. In her situation, it might be that the power balance in her relationship favours her partner, the indigenous partner in terms of language, familiarity with surroundings, networks, procedures, and social support (Clulow, 1993). Jasmine had difficulty making friends in her partner's village, missed her own personal space and resented the influence of his ever-present family on their domestic lives. Hence, she strained under the compromise of living in

his Arab village and its associated psychological hardships and yearned for a more familiar and comfortable environment. The struggle of keeping a firm hold on their Jewish identity and happiness was evident in some of the women's interviews.

*He celebrates, he celebrates his holidays with his parents and I celebrate mine, my holidays with my family ... I wish we could be together [Yael, Haifa].*

*In the way that I don't have my family. And again, this is the point. Actually, I have but I don't have. Because I can go to them, I talk to my mother ... but, the fact that I know that they think that I disappointed them by marrying an Arab in this point, this is a loss. And with this I have to live [Effy, Netanya].*

Hence, the family holidays she once enjoyed and all her past happy associations were lost. For these women some compromises meant in making trade-offs. The 11 women who did not convert to Islam, in this compromise marital model, relinquished some of their interests for their partner, and also made adjustments (or sacrifices) for the sake of their relationship's coexistence, possibly resulting in a feeling of dissatisfaction. For example, Karen [Jerusalem] reported giving up culturally bound interests to make room for those of her partner.

*And I also thought he was more open than he was. I thought the children would be both Jewish and Muslim. But, from his point of view, the kids are Muslim with a Jewish mother. He thinks they are. For them, if the father is Muslim then they are Muslim ... He won't let them [the children] be Jewish ... When they were at my mother's house Rami wanted to wear a kippah<sup>37</sup> that the Jews wear. It was very hard for Asif to accept this so he bought them a Muslim Kippah. So now Rami wears the Kippah that the Muslims wear, similar to the Jews... [Karen, Jerusalem].*

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<sup>37</sup> A thin, usually slightly rounded cloth cap worn by Jewish men. A Kippah is worn to symbolise that man exists only from his Kippah down; God exists above the Kippah.

Essentially, this is a less desirable characteristic of the compromise model in cross-frontier relationships; the women may have gained (a partner, love, family), and remained strong in their identity declaration, but may have also lost, through compromise, significant aspects that were formerly important to them. It may therefore be suggested—to some extent similar to Roer-Strier and Ezra's (2006) study findings—that competition existed between the Jewish and Arab culture, religion, and/or identity for some of the women in the present study:

*I adapt myself to the situations I am in. whenever I need a favour, when I need, like, whenever I go to a governmental office, so it's good for me to use my identity card that I am Jewish and ... I don't know. I am a person that adapts herself to wherever she is. Deep down inside I know that I am Jewish. I can't help it, I was born like this. And even if it was written that I am a Muslim, it is only on paper. But, I adapt myself to the area I find myself in. So, what, my identity? A Jew amongst Arabs. And sometimes an Arab amongst Jews. As it's convenient ... the truth ... I feel like a Jew amongst the Arabs. And this is the truth that not everyone knows [Naama, Jaffa].*

Hence, in some instances, the important issues are never resolved but are liable to resurface repeatedly, to be renegotiated or argued over, time and time again. In this kind of relationship arrangement it may be speculated that no one is really fully happy, as the sacrifices may be greater than any advantage gained.

Hence, some women in the compromise marital model exemplify an adaptation pattern that incorporates their retaining their Jewish identity yet combining both Jewish and Arab cultures, choosing certain aspects of their spouse's culture and integrating these aspects into their lifestyle. These aspects can include an appreciation of some of his values, while retaining a desire for shared responsibilities in the household. However negotiating a compromise relationship model can be difficult.

*I feel in a way it's hopeless and in a way it's hopeful. I have given up, at the same time I haven't. It's having these two diametrically-opposed points all at once ... But it's probably*

*because of my personality as well ... that's why I chose this marriage because I love those things [Vanessa, Kibbutz].*

Some women, however, consider this compromise type of marriage contract better than no give-and-take at all, and feel that it affords advantages and a learning experience; if the women keep at it long enough, renegotiating and trying new solutions to problems encountered, they may eventually reach a compromise that is satisfying to both partners, to which this article will refer as 'consensus.' They may then claim to have done their part toward making the marriage/relationship work, which results in a trade-off.

### *8.3.3 Consensus relationship/marital model*

According to Romano (2001), the best means for handling cross-frontier differences is through achieving consensus for both partners. The consensus model is associated with compromise because it involves a give-and-take approach from both partners yet does not involve any trade-offs. In this kind of relationship agreement partners are not rigidly fixed in either culture, such that conflicts regarding child rearing, holidays, and negative outsider attitudes are avoided. The three women depicted in this model (Galia, Smadar, Belinda) did not convert to Islam, encountered no difficulties with their immediate family and were welcomed by their partner's Muslim families. Additionally, they came from happy, well adjusted families, were aware of and were secure about their identities and, were basically comfortable with themselves. In this marital model, neither partner sacrifices anything that is critical to his or her well-being:

*We celebrate the holidays at his family and at mine... because it's a meeting [Belinda, Haifa].*

The women reported that the encounter with their husbands' culture influenced their way of thinking, developed their critical sense, and changed their approach to customs that they had never questioned before. This served as a way to bridge personal differences related to broader cultural differences. Delineating from this is the fact that both sides of the partners' families accept and are on friendly terms with the couple.

*They [her family] didn't cut off ties. And also his family accepted me. They are five brothers and they even love me even more than the Arab brides [Smadar, Haifa].*

The women exemplified emotional independence and displayed confidence in the relationship to parents and in-laws and other social relations. With regards to problem solving, they realised that if a solution didn't work, or that the sacrifice was too great for one or the other, they would try a different one. Both were whole people and full partners. They had, or developed, a solid sense of self, of their own differences.

*Also, no. Really, no. I know eh the situation exactly, I know, I can think all the liberal thoughts, meaning I can eh absolutely talk with Ayaz about everything and tell him that this is ok and that this isn't ok. And I have no; we have no problem to talk about this, to argue about things. Many times he agrees with me and many times I agree with him and if we don't agree than we don't agree. Then I said x and he said y and we go on. It is not a problem... [Galia, Haifa].*

*Those couples wishing to raise their children only as Jews, to send them to Jewish schools without any knowledge or exposure to Arabic culture hurts me. It bothers me that some women convert to Islam for their husbands. I don't agree with this especially if the women go to a village and lives there with her partner. She is away from her routine, familiarities, her people, family that she may have broken ties with. This hurts me. This lifestyle for these women, no matter how much they love their husbands and would go anywhere for them, is too difficult. It is difficult to pull someone apart from her upbringing, her roots [Belinda, Haifa].*

Those in the consensus model depicted an acculturation based on bicultural adaptation from both partners in the relationships. Both partners were, or became, strong and secure enough in themselves to allow their partners to be different, without considering it a betrayal or a threat. Furthermore, they were able to give to one another unconditionally, whenever and wherever the need was greatest—even though it may have been contrary to the initial agreement.

According to Romano (2001), the consensus relationship/marriage model is ideal, as issues are worked on until a harmonious resolution is reached and both partners

emerge with their dignity intact, as in the case of political discussion. Also, the partners were flexible enough to work through sensitive problems until they found an amicable solution. In other words, this model requires both partners to employ creative solutions in which humour, flexibility, and divergent thinking play an important part. Lastly, the findings in this study further strengthen the assumptions that were made by Falicov (1995) and Root (2001). They stated that acculturation operates as a two-way process, influencing the partner who belongs to the dominant group (Israeli Jewish women) as well as the one who belongs to the minority group (the Israeli Arab partner). Both partners undergo a process of personal transformation, which can be defined as mutual cultural adaptation (Roer-Strier & Ezra, 2006).

In both the compromise and consensus marital models, the women kept a firm hold on their Jewish identity. For these women, their Jewish ethnic identity was an influential and pivotal matter for placing themselves in context with the world (Erikson, 1966). Similar to some definitions of ethnicity (Senior & Bhopal, 1994), the women identified themselves as containing a Jewish ethnic identity which shares culture and traditions that are distinctive and have persisted from generation to generation. Hence, cross-frontier relationships can be some indication of acculturation (Spickard, 1989), whereby it was necessary for the women's partners to acculturate to some degree into Israeli Jewish society. The women in these groups did not learn Arabic, continued to speak Hebrew amongst their families, and lived in Jewish sectors within Israel. Furthermore, they continued to celebrate Jewish holidays and raise their children with knowledge of Jewish traditions, although this was more prevalent and salient for the women in the consensus marital model. The women in the consensus model seemed to celebrate the Jewish holidays just as regularly as those individuals in Israel who are involved in Jewish-Jewish relationships/marriages. This is one more supporting example of the fact that cross-frontier relationships relate to ethnic issues, which can include the survival of individual and group ethnic identity.

## **9 Interview Overview: reflexive thinking**

The sample in this study was relatively small. Nevertheless, it is argued here that although one may tend to be cautious in accepting some derived conclusions/generalisations from such a study, this one did allow the researcher to make some very useful and important observations regarding the sample members and the interview and interviewer's role. In this chapter the author will examine her role as researcher and how it influenced the generation of data and interpretation. Also considered are the inherent effects of these interviews on the interviewees, i.e. what were the possibilities that the interviews offered participants and what, if any, were the associated problems? As much as the psych-social factors are considered, transcripts were analysed on the basis of three obvious factors that most probably played a role during the interviews: 1) impression management, 2) problems and, 3) possibilities. These three tripartite aspects can best be seen as shaping the interview's framework from within which conversations took place and thus can serve as a means to develop a way of simultaneously understanding both the psychological and social meanings of their narratives.

### **9.1 Impression management**

Some of the possibilities presented by the interview (e.g. to discuss, debate, challenge, etc.), might have the potential to create problems for the study's informants. For example, when conducting the interviews, the researcher went as a stranger wanting to enquire about their personal relationships and, at times, asked intimate or seemingly intimate questions. In effect they displayed their relationship to someone outside of their private sphere. Accordingly, the subjects may have felt a responsibility to represent their relationship in a certain way (i.e. impression management whereby they created an ideal image of their relationship) for the researcher, and by proxy, the public due to the perception of the interviewee about the interviewer.

The women's probability of employing impression management and their desire to create an ideal image of their relationships fits in with existing literature on marital relationships. There is now a good deal of evidence from sociological studies that people 'put on a public face' (Dryden, 1999) when they discuss relationships and the women participants in this study may experience a pressure to present their relationships

in this 'socially acceptable' way. This may reflect similar findings to those made by Singelis et al.'s study (1999), where they demonstrated that individuals with an interdependent (more collectivist) concept of self were more prone to embarrassment, and that these effects too were stronger among cultures with higher mean interdependence (Israeli Jewish and Arab self-concept are characterized as being interdependent and collectivist). Israeli culture strongly emphasises the family and community, at times based on religious principles (Peres & Katz, 1981). Hence, these cultural factors (shame or embarrassment) may make the interviewees conceal more from the interviewer so that they would not 'lose face.' The women while discussing their stories freely with emotions, may, at the same time, refrain from revealing elements of weakness, vulnerability, situations that sadden them (but can talk about anger, happiness, etc.).

This phenomenon may be even more salient for the women in this study because of the delicate political environment in Israel. Hence, the women may have experienced pressure to present their relationships in this 'socially acceptable and desirable' way, or to omit certain information in order to prevent the interviewer from learning something about them. Essentially, the researcher needed to be aware of what people might be attempting to do or achieve in their narratives. The researcher needed to ground the microanalysis into a broader analysis, one that took into account social desirability for what occurred during the narratives.

#### 9.1.1 *The practice of toning down*

The practice of toning down relationship stresses, challenges, and problems by making minimising comments, provided couple members with a 'safe' forum for discussing sensitive issues while being mindful of their social obligations, namely impression management. In this way, they presented a cautious challenge to the status quo of their relationships so that any problems they might have would be presented in a socially acceptable manner. Impression management creates a certain façade for the researcher. While minimising comments could be interpreted as a means to maintain impression management on one hand, it may also be an indication of strong couple coalition.



## **9.2 Problems: the interviewer and reflexivity**

In my relationship with the women, there were some areas of difficulty, which it is important to discuss as openly as possible, and although these arise in relation to Tali (a convert to Islam) they also have relevance to my relationship with some of the women who did not convert to Islam. For example, differences in the ways the researcher and her informants related to each other were at times affected by prejudices. Essentially I was identified as a Jewish person approaching them to investigate their lives because of my Israeli name and proficiency in Hebrew. Likewise, my external appearance may have also influenced the interviewee's perception about me and consequently their style and emotional pattern of relating to me even before the interview began. For instance, the women may have immediately stereotyped me as being a secular westernised educated Jewish woman because of my blonde hair, green eyes and way of dressing. The important issue is the extent to which this might have influenced the data, and my readiness to be alert to these factors. The first of these concerns is the type of 'fit' made between myself as interviewer (with my style, approach, Jewish nationality, appearance and personality) and the interviewee (with her style of relating to me).

When considering the type of fit made between interviewer and interviewee, one should take note that my very presence might have made the interview relationships less comfortable, particularly with the informants Tali and Norit, who were extremely cautious during the interviews. This notion was referred to earlier (see impression management). I also found that the women participants who converted to Islam communicated differently in the interviews than those that did not convert. Most (only three of them were very expressive in the interviews) were not able to reflect deeply about their relationships as the non-convert participants did. Hence, it seems that whilst I did make a good 'fit' with some women, I did experience difficulties in their suspicion of me from some of the women who converted to Islam. For example, some women who converted to Islam communicated to me, at the outset, with some guarded suspicions about me and the study. This may also be attributed to the fact that some of the content which each brought up in their interview material may have happened to touch on particularly conflicting areas in themselves, which might have made it more difficult for them to feel entirely at ease with me. They were aware of these sensitive areas which were being prodded, and to this extent affected the material which they

shared with me. Alternatively, perhaps they did not want to be challenged as they invested much time and gave up so much for their partner by means of conversion and moving into his respective Arab neighbourhood and community. This may have communicated itself unconsciously to them. At the same time, however, my lack of a definite native-born Israeli Hebrew accent, as well as my western appearance (blond hair, green eyes, etc.) separated me from the typical Israeli Jewish persona and may have opened communication channels between us. This seemed to be the case for a few of the women who converted to Islam as they openly shared their stories to a deeper level with me.

Above all, my role as interviewer and my association with a foreign university markedly influenced the way in which the study's participants related to me. Most of the participants seemed to be more at ease since I was a foreigner and associated with a university where my work would be published first and foremost abroad. Some of the women, mostly the women who did not convert to Islam, expressed enthusiastic interest in the research and willingness to participate. Contrast to this attitude was that of the women who converted to Islam. In general, the women who did not convert to Islam, from the outset viewed me with marked respect and deference and since I was the one to interview them personally they increasingly afforded me a more elevated status. During my interviews with them, the idealisation became more apparent as did the veneration. I later came to realise that these qualities, with which I was invested, had almost always been extremely important parts of their own values and inner life. For some of the women (especially those who did not convert) I came to symbolise the achievement of their educational ambitions, the status and community recognition which they sought and which had been salient values throughout in their lives.

I felt increasingly uncomfortable and impatient at being idealised and placed on this pedestal of learning, particularly as my major research task was to relate to them personally and help them to feel comfortable within the relationship so that they might talk freely about themselves, their experiences and feelings. The part of themselves that needed to use me in this way was the part of which some hid behind formidable intellectual defences (Effy, Netanya; Liora, Haifa). It was also the self-idealised part of themselves which by an unconscious desire they put into me. This was felt from some of them to the extent that I did not feel that they related to me as the person I am, but as an ideal object unconsciously used for identification purposes.

### 9.2.1 *The impact of interviews on the researcher*

It should also be noted the effect these interviews had on me given my own personal background and the importance of being aware of these feelings. For instance, when interviewing the women who converted to Islam I noticed I became slightly agitated that the women gave up their past identity in exchange for their new Islamic one. However, in recognising these feelings I immediately tried to remain as neutral as possible in the interviews and remain impartial to my own views and beliefs ensuring my own feelings did not interfere with my interaction with the participants.

In another instance, one non-convert asked me what I thought about people who entered Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships and whether or not I think they are intelligent. She then went on to ask me if “I would ever go out with an Arab guy.” And I replied, “That is a good question... I don’t know.” The participants had a right to ask me questions especially after sharing their personal stories with me. However, in this particular case the woman surprised me. Given my own experience in a mixed relationship, the question posed to me was a difficult one to answer and I struggled in some contemplation for some time thereafter.

## 9.3 Possibilities

Some of the women’s idealisation and veneration they associated me with had other ramifications. On one level, there was an awareness of them ascribing to me an idealised identity based on occupational role and foreign status, to which I was inwardly objecting. In other words, I felt that I became an idealised object for them when they related to me when thinking about their relationships. In addition, what I came to see was that in elevating me, some of the women were also elevating themselves. In other words, association with an academic researcher who is foreign and was invested in her made them feel valued, appreciated and respected. This suggests that they might have been more enthusiastic in participating and learning more about the study’s aims.

On another level, they might be relating their narratives in the interviews to meet some of their related inner needs. For example, an opportunity to make sense of, and understand, their relationship was provided by means of talking through their life stories and relationships. The women may simultaneously try to rehearse basic facets of relationship dynamics and conflicts to herself (and to me) and, at some level, may try to

work out whether her struggles are legitimate (or perhaps to enlist my support). Participating in the interviews may have also provided them with a means for self-growth, providing an arena for reflection and reconsideration of the nature of their relationship, as they recounted their experiences all over again. In this case, they may be searching for self-growth, or, simply to be helpful to me in my studies and because they found participation intrinsically interesting. An example of this is found with Effy [Netanya].

*I thought to myself, you know, and I said to my son, 'listen, I am bored. There are many things, because of my age, that I have done, and eh, I have no interest to do them again. I feel like something new' ... Now, like I said, I simply would like to meet new people today that are in our position, especially in the same status. And, eh, mixed couples, children of mixed couples ... I simply wanted to start looking, to make ties with such people eh and also I said, 'people who are not afraid to eh eh live eventually in both worlds, the Arabic and the Jewish,' and then you rang... [Effy, Netanya].*

There are other possibilities, however. The interview also provided a dialogue for discussing topics not normally discussed in the rush of everyday life, or tucked away in the shadows of the political tension, the deep-rooted hatred, and turmoil between the Jews and Arabs living in Israel. More generally, they give the opportunity for heightened reflection, a possible space for self-enhancement and to explain their relationship in rational terms. At times, in the series of interviews, I also succeeded in getting some of the women who converted to Islam to talk freely and personally about themselves and their feelings. For instance, as the interview progressed from establishing a biographical background to motivations for entering the cross-frontier relationship, and then to relationship dynamics, so does the interview become a means of fulfilling a psychological need and even a right for participants. The interview can be offered as a sort of therapy for those women who are a minority of non-conformists who are defying the norm in Israeli society, those that may be searching for meaning and structure in their lives. This notion of therapeutic interview outcome was reported in Daniella's account below. At the closing stages of her interview, she stated that I was like a psychologist for her.

*I don't talk about this to anyone from the outside. I try, to not eh try not to show my pain to the outside, you understand? It hurts, it's ... These feelings ... I show them only to my children, to prepare them for the future. And to you ... instead of going to a psychologist, I talk to you. It's better ... its confusion for the entire life [Daniella, living in an Arab Village].*

It may be suggested that Daniella clearly enjoyed and valued the therapeutic element of the interviews. She related to me personally and directly and with apparent emotional involvement. For her and for some others, the interview required quite strenuous efforts, both in concentration and the expressive aspects of her material. I found my academic skills being fully called upon in each interview, bringing into play all the insight which I could find to understand what they were trying to convey to me. I felt absorbed in the process and able to feel empathy for her as a person.

## 10 Conclusion

*You fall in love, you think there will be wonderful relationship  
but there's a bigger realm outside of that relationship that you  
have to contend with, one which has its own sets of struggles...*

(Rossenblatt & Tubbs, 1998, p. 131).

While writing about these Israeli Jewish & Arab couples the author has no particular wish to promote it as a social goal. Nor does the author wish to negate and condemn it as a practice of individual choice. She is impartial toward the phenomenon studied here. Instead, it is suggested that these relationships may not be suitable for everyone and that individuals considering these relationships should take every opportunity beforehand to find out what they are getting into. For some women, these relationships may lead to contentment as well as great personal growth. Simply learning to live with someone from a different background has a potential to increase an individuals' understanding and tolerance. Yet, for others, involvement in such a relationship may be a painful and shattering experience. Many of the relationship outcomes depend on an individual's expectations and adaptability as well as outside circumstances which may work against the couple. Love is not enough to make these relationships work and there are many questions future spouses should ask themselves before committing to one another (e.g. capacity to cope). Involvement in cross-frontier relationships is a more complicated route in life, one which necessitates more work, more time, and more empathy- in other words, more of everything (Romano, 2001). For this reason, it is important for individuals who are considering entering such relationships to bear in mind any possible consequences.

### 10.1 On a political and policy level

The findings of the current study can be used to better inform those people (clinical practitioners, counsellors, solicitors, government agencies, teachers, etc.) who are working with the cross-frontier relationship couples and their offspring about the specific needs of this unique group. Of particular importance is the information about the inner strengths the studied women have adapted for effective coping. In the course

of this study it was observed that there is a lack of proactive educative programs for ethnically-mixed couples in Israel<sup>38</sup>. Israel as a state, and the different communities involved, do not want to encourage this phenomenon. The author recommends having proactive programs since such programs would clearly assist existing or potential cross-frontier couples endure or prepare, respectively, for such a relationships/marriage. It is strongly recommended that newly converted women to Islam, or those considering converting to Islam, be given more detailed information about their new religion and its related culture, as well as learning a new language. This support may be in the form of 'culture learning' classes that can take place both before and during the marriage/relationship. Such activity should ease the women's religious and cultural conversion and assimilation if they so desire. In addition, programs' personnel should also be able to discourage or help postpone potential marriages when thought to be necessary.

A proactive program should enable existing mixed couples to discuss relationship issues, to learn or improve their ability to communicate and resolve various

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<sup>38</sup> Recommendations for cross-frontier marriages have been made in Northern Ireland (Stringer, 1994) and can be applicable to the present study's Israeli sample. The recommendations put forward suggested the following measures be carried out: a) *International law* should take account of the diversity, which characterises family life today; a supra-national framework is required so that the outcome of family disputes, which can cross national boundaries, should not depend on the specific law of any one country; b) *Educational opportunities* exist to break down barriers of prejudice. Children of cross-national marriages can be integrated in the educational system with proper sensitivity and in ways that respect their differences. Individuals planning to marry across frontiers can be encouraged to think ahead and prepare for the challenges they may face later on. Organisations helping such couples have the responsibility of training their staff. The media and the arts also have a part to play in sensitising the community to the predicaments of those in cross-frontier marriages; c) *Socio-economic policy* should take account of cross-frontier marriages. The issues involved typically need clearer definitions. It is not helpful to see such a marriage only as a solution to obtaining the right to work in, or the citizenship of a country (which is sometimes that case); nor should those entitled to live and work in a desired country be socially and economically disadvantaged because of their marital status, and; d) *Psycho-social factors* affect the capacity of those in cross-frontier marriages to make the most of their situation; counsellors and others need training to develop understanding of the interplay of social and psychological factors affecting the partners and children. In counselling, it helps to show that the couples are more similar than dissimilar.

conflicts effectively (political, family issues, etc.). Programs should aim to promote (existing and potential) couples' resilience through self diagnostics. It is recommended that in the case of new potential couples, input from veteran couples should be utilised extensively. Also recommended is facilitating positive peer relations and support through social events and joint projects. In this way, members can confront and realise events that they may not have anticipated or have discounted as unlikely to happen to them throughout their relationship. Newly formed couples need a realistic portrayal of relationship constellations, difficulties they will inherently encounter, and how they can, despite local obstacles, form committed and enduring relationships. Knowledge about trials and tribulations might soften possible future disappointments and help overcome them. This is a crucial element that should be transmitted to new relationships.

Israeli Jewish & Arab couples should not expect a smooth idealised relationship/marriage in Israel. This is because the Arabs there are a minority in a predominantly Jewish state which is in a state of war (of existence) with the Arab nation surrounding it for the last 60 years or so. Therefore there is always some tension between the related communities, the degree/severity of which depends on the security/external conditions at the time as well as economic, local, and individuals' educational background. Arabs and Jews are ethnically conservative and both communities do basically resent mixed couples. The situation is especially difficult for couples with Arab Muslims members who are both often in contact with the Jewish sector. If the woman/wife is secluded (such as in a small Arab or Bedouin village) and also accepted by the local Arab family/community, she, and consequently her husband and children, would most probably be less susceptible to external pressures/difficulties as when exposed to the general public (the kids in this case will basically be raised and identify themselves as Arabs). Similarly, it is also easier for mixed couples who reside in small more liberal/tolerating (predominantly Jewish) communities who have some experience with such cases.

It is intuitively obvious that families need to be taken into account; the results of this study suggest that families are a significant factor in determining the quality of these cross-frontier relationships. The success of the marriages and the well being of their children are, in part, both dependent on the ability of the parents of the women to remain relevant sources of advice and support (the acceptance of the Jewish convert by her Arab husband's family is of course also important). As such, suggested proactive



programs could take a role in involving parents (their attendance in group meetings or by sending pamphlets by post), explaining to them what their children are experiencing, their feelings and outlining the choices their children made and the process by which these decisions were made.

Establishing how much support programs can help to create, dissipate and maintain healthy Israeli Jewish & Arab cross-frontier couple relationships is clearly an important area of future research. It is logical to assume that such programs would be even more important when dealing with the couples' offspring and their future generations, as it can ultimately impact on their surrounding society. Leading by example is the best tactic. Providing insight to a wide range of people involved or affiliated with such relationships, and even the general public, makes sense.

Israeli Jewish & Arab couples sometimes emigrate to other countries in a search for a more accommodating society or/and better economical opportunities. It is important to note that when dealing with migrating cross-frontier couples, success of adaptation in the new country seems to be, in part, dependent on their prior psychological health. Furthermore, immigration policies in countries outside of Israel may be a major stress factor for them leading to psychopathology.

A final point to note when taking an integrative over-view of the different women's narratives is that there might be a possible similarity between aspects of the cross-frontier relationships and Jews & Arabs generally (e.g. Jewish and Arab politicians and policy makers). Local politicians may derive important information from the present research. One may also wonder if the couples' dynamics and communication patterns can be applied to the Israeli political dynamics and communication between Jews and Arab. Can it be used to improve relations between the two communities? The author thinks that this is definitely an area that can be exploited academically, but in reality she doubts that the presence of such Israeli Jewish & Arab couples is a viable solution to Israeli's political problems. However, some may say that it is an opportunity to move into a different form of dialogue on the subject of Jewish-Arab relations in Israel, a dialogue involving the voices of these women and their families.

## 10.2 On a counselling level

Not all cultures are open to professional help-giving. This may be especially true for the women who converted to Islam. If this situation occurs then the couple should seek out a respected older adult, a religious leader, or older friends who may be able to help them identify and deal with specific problems. The crucial aspect to be considered in these situations is to find someone knowledgeable about both cultures and can make neutral and accurate interpretations about the partners' mind sets without being impeded by his or her own cultural biases (Romano, 2001).

Based on evidence from other types of cross-frontier couples (e.g. Kenney, 2002), counselling for existing Israeli Jewish & Arab couples or those considering entering such relationships, may prove to be beneficial. This may have special relevance if the counsellor is knowledgeable about cross-cultural counselling. A good counsellor can help the couple examine their motives for the marriage and their expectations regarding life together and to also learn how to identify underlying problems and potential points of conflict (Romano, 2001).

Cross-frontier couples may benefit from meeting with counsellors by talking through potential differences with their partners and being ready to work them out. Hence, the counsellor may reveal potential cultural aspects of conflicts, thus depersonalising them, whilst helping them obtain culturally appropriate methods for resolving their differences. With this outside perspective on conflicting issues, the couple can become culturally sensitive to each other and can learn to resolve the issues instead of attacking one another. Essentially, the cross-frontier couple can create a symbolic union by talking about similarities and differences in beliefs, including attitudes and values and, consequently, attaining a uniquely shared understanding of themselves. Through the counsellor's guidance in conveying the importance of this communication, couples can anticipate what they will confront and/or what they are experiencing. Also, it should be stressed that clinicians must be careful to work on problems the client has identified as problems, and not commonly held beliefs or stereotypes (Kenney, 2002). This stance will allow the clinician to understand not only what might be helpful to a particular couple, but will also enable the couple to constructively look at what strengths and resources they can use in their problem solving. The couples should look at the positives in their relationship/marriage and

concentrate on their strengths, channeling energy they might have put into settling (external and internal) disputes into finding ways to accommodate the external pressures. Additional help will be required when dealing with partners who are very marginal in character. In that respect it is also vital to prevent unhealthy relationships from committing to one another and to guide such existing couples into a less bumpy separation.

### **10.3 Legal issues to consider**

There may be legal issues to consider, such as children's rights and affiliation, divorce, women's rights, ownership of property and various other legal issues pertaining to cross-frontier couple relationships. These issues will now be discussed below.

#### **10.3.1 *Children's rights and affiliation***

Given the fact that some of the mixed marriages involve children, one may wonder which of the parents' families will have custody of the children if something were to happen to both parents. Also to be asked is whether there are any norms and / or regulations that may interfere with pre-existing stated wishes of one or both partners in this regard or otherwise may affect the outcome of such a procedure.

Problems related to the determination of the religious/national affiliation of the affected children do often arise. Under Islamic law (*Shari'a*), a marriage contract between a Muslim man and a non-Muslim woman from a Monotheistic faith (i.e. Jews or Christians) is allowed and the children can then be considered Muslim. Under the same law, a Muslim woman, on the other hand, is only allowed to marry a Muslim man (i.e. having a non-Muslim father means that the children would grow up as non-Muslims) and thus such marriage is considered void (i.e. an adulterous affair). In contrary, under Jewish law (*Halakha*), any child born to a Jewish mother is considered Jewish regardless of the father's nationality or religious affiliation.

In Israel the situation is such that some related questions may arise: will the children of these couples be identified as Jewish or non-Jewish in their Israeli formal documents? Will they be allowed or required to choose a nationality/religion and if so at what age? Consequently, will they be required to enlist (Jews must) in the Israeli armed forces or not? If the children must choose their nationality, ethnicity and/or extent of

religiosity, will they follow their parent's traditions or choose according to their subjective will? Will choosing be an arduous task? As mentioned previously, the notion of a fixed identity is a fantasy (Hall, 1992) and the offspring of such couples may live a life torn between different identities.

### 10.3.2 *Divorce*

Similar determination-difficulties also exist in the case of a divorce: namely, the legal grounds for a divorce and the custodial rights of each parent afterward. Do special custodial considerations/limitations apply because parents are of different religions/nationalities? There are also special cases to be considered such as of a divorce involving a formerly Jewish mother who converted to Islam and may have lived with her (non-Jewish) husband's family. Would she be able to take the children back with her when she returns to her own family and/or ethnic environment?

Under Muslim law, for example, a husband is permitted to divorce his wife without any formal legal procedure (he only has to verbally state unequivocally three times his intention to renounce the marriage). On the other hand, under the same law a woman has a much harder time to achieve a divorce. In Morocco, for example, she must have 12 witnesses to her husband's adultery to be able to divorce him. Other important issues to be resolved are those regarding alimony, property division, and the continued residence of the divorced convert in her partner's place/village. If the woman retains her original (non-Muslim) religion, a difficult divorce will most likely end up in an Israeli civil court, as opposed to a religious court that is usually employed by Jewish couples.

Over the past several decades, marriages/divorces between non-Muslim women and Muslim men have been well documented by the media. Of particular interest for the Western public were custody-battles in which a Muslim husband unlawfully kidnaps the children and flees to his native (or other Muslim) country or when he prevents the (originally non-Muslim) wife to have any access to them within the Muslim country or to be able to travel with the children to the West.

### 10.3.3 *Women's rights*

Israel is basically a democratic country and as such protects women's rights. However, in the case of a woman who converted to Islam and who lives in her husband's village, reality in this male-dominated environment may be less than ideal

(by Israeli and western standards). There is the question of whether she will be able to retain her freedom of movement and of dress. Will she be legally (or physically) punished for infidelity or for refusing her husband's 'marital privileges'? Basically, one has to find if the converted woman is still a free individual with the same legal rights as her husbands, or is she subject to his or his family authority, as is the traditional case within many Arab communities especially the Bedouins.

#### **10.3.4**            *Ownership or property*

Related to the above issue of women's rights, is the right to own property and the right to have individual free will. For example, it should be important to find out if a now-Muslim married woman be able to own property in her own name and sign contracts for herself and if she and her Arab partner can/will have their own checking accounts. That may often depend on the (Muslim) husband's educational level and general background. More educated urban male partners will tend to offer their partners more individual freedom, such as typically encountered in the Jewish society, as compared to less educated rural ones.

#### **10.3.5**            *Other legal issues*

Other issues to be considered are employment restrictions for the woman and what are the Muslim laws regarding entitlement to a fair trial and legal representation in case of suspected wrongdoing for those women who converted and live in Arab villages or Arab neighbourhoods of mixed towns. Employment restrictions are typically more pronounced in traditional Arab settings and countries as compared to the general Israeli society. Also, in Israel, criminal wrongdoings are handled by the general civil court, although traditional family vendettas still occur in the Arab/Muslim and Druze sectors.

### **10.4 Limitations and future research**

This entire research is exploratory. A more detailed quantitative study could look at the causal role of particular factors on these cross-frontier relationships/marriages (e.g. what leads to their positive adaptation or mental health distress). For instance, although the present study's Brief Symptom Inventory results are tentative, it does indicate that the women in Israeli Jewish & Arab couple relationships did show more psychological symptoms than individuals in the general Israeli

population. However, and as made note of earlier, the women may have been sensitised by the presence of the interviewer and by the sensitive interview discussion such that they may have had a higher propensity to mark scores they may have otherwise marked as marginal. This suggests a necessity to conduct a future study investigating specifically on the women's mental health.

In general, findings from the present study are tentative and a future study can be broadened to include a larger sample of women, husbands and more family members over a longer time period. If more time was available, the researcher could have potentially found more participants. Hence, an important limitation here is the relatively small sample involved. Thus, the present study is a predominately qualitative one (though it is still a relatively larger one than in previous similar studies) and therefore the derived findings should be treated with some caution. Furthermore, time and scope limitations resulted in a single interview per woman (with one exception). For this reason, additional follow-up interviews with the subject women would probably have yielded more in-depth information. Obviously, and as mentioned already, follow up studies of the interviewed subjects and their families, especially their offspring, over the next few years could be very fundamental. It is recommended that interviews with the extended family (possibly all three generations), friends and community members, be carried out. These could enrich our understanding of the process, such as adaptation patterns, that these couples and their families have gone through. The socialisation of children, for example, seems to be a major issue affecting the adaptation of cross-frontier couples. This topic was raised and discussed only briefly.

Another caveat which is important to note is that this study only examined women (as mentioned above). The interviewer's gender and international background seemed to help create rapport with the women but may have limited the interviewed husbands' expression. At times, women who agreed to participate insisted that their partners did not have interest or the time "for this sort of thing," [Belinda, Haifa]. The women generally showed more interest and agreed to be interviewed more readily than their male partners. The subject women shouldered the burden of responsibility for the 'smoothness' of the interview visit even when their partner objected to their participation in the study or refused themselves to participate in it. Hence, a decision was made to focus on interviewing the (Jewish) women and not the Arab husbands. Note that only 10 Arab male partners reluctantly agreed to be interviewed. As

mentioned earlier, it was apparent that interviewing Arab men on marital/personal issues, especially so by a woman, was problematic, which is a well known cultural-ethnic phenomenon here (like in all male-dominated societies). Arab men are generally more reserved and/or private than Jewish ones. This is especially so with strangers, females and in an interview settings. Furthermore, the fact that I can or may be identified as an Israeli Jew (or even as a Jewish person living outside of Israel) may have, and probably did, create a credibility/trust problem with the Arab male partner. Hence, both gender and cross-cultural factors affected and actually limited the research in this case. A future study should take into account the male partners' perceptions regarding their relationships; the missing information might be obtained in the future by employing an Arab male researcher to interview the Arab husbands/partners. Data obtained by such interviews should provide a more comprehensive understanding on the subject matter. Lastly, the findings from the present study are variable. The present study was carried out during a 'lull' period between Israeli Jews and Arabs (November 2003 and November 2004). However, events such as the war between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon (summer 2006) may render significantly different quantitative scores as well as different qualitative interview material.

Note that the researcher did not study any control group(s), such as Jewish-Jewish or Arab-Arab couples, because it was reasoned that there are sufficient data on same-same couple constellations in Israel found in the scholarly literature. Furthermore, exploratory studies do not normally have a control group. It is also important to recognise the uniqueness of the socio-political situation surrounding these mixed couples in Israel, due to the differing political, cultural and historical backgrounds coupled with the given continued animosity between the two ethnic/national groups, which are still embroiled in a regional conflict. Rightly so, comparable research cannot be replicated for different couples in differing cultures with similar deep animosity unless similar conditions exist (e.g. Jewish and German partners during WWII era).

This issue calls for an awareness of the complexities of cultural adaptation of cross-frontier couples such as the multidirectional adaptation process influenced by societal power relations, in-laws, and the political situation. It points out the importance of studying the perceptions of both partners, not only the minority partner, and of documenting positive as well as negative or challenging aspects of cross-frontier relationships. The term cross-frontier is used in a variety of ways, for example, referring

to different faiths, cultures, ethnicities, and political contexts. The complexity described here calls attention to the need for developing a more cohesive foundation to this subject within the scholarly literature.

In a current reality of cross-frontier relationships/marriages around the world, the findings of this study are important on both an academic and practical level. On an academic level, they contribute to our understanding of the particular experiences of these couple members in Israel, their needs and challenges to consider in light of the political milieu in Israel. They highlight their needs throughout the relationship process and elements that may contribute to their positive adaptation. They also point to the different experience and needs of these cross-frontier women and their respective families, particularly their offspring. Not much literature exists on these existing couples in Israel and so this topic needed to be explored. This research also holds within it a number of important practical clinical and policy implications; it will provide a beginning framework for clinical implications and others interested in doing more research on these relationships and designing theoretical models for working with this population.



## 10.5 A concluding remark

This research studied the experience of the women members involved in Israeli Jewish & Arab cross-frontier relationships. It attempted to move away from relying solely on traditional concepts of psychopathology, marginal individuals and differences amongst cultures of those involved. Instead, it also examined opportunities for growth and development. For some of the women, their relationships can answer these needs. It can be an opportunity for the women to develop ego strengths and through their ability to form close relationships, to experience feelings of competence and strength. Many of the women interviewed, despite the difficulties and challenges, spoke of hope and belief in a better 'future.' Many displayed remarkable levels of adaptation and functioning as a strong couple. However, it is important to remember that beneath the external adaptation and functioning, these women are confronting and struggling with inner processes of construction and consolidation of a sense of self as well as relationship consolidation. They are making sense of who they are as women who have crossed boundaries to partake in these relationships. The following quote, taking from Daniella's personal experiences reminds the reader of the deep inner process which probably happens within the majority of the women in the study. It is to this inner process that this study returns and with which it concludes.

*You can't erase everything. There isn't a thing like this. A liar would say, 'I forgot about the Jewish world. Or that I am' ... she is a liar, someone that who isn't ... No, you don't forget ... how can I tell the heart, to the head, to my mind that ... to look after, between the mind and the heart ... I have, I have fights between my mind and my heart. That's all. You don't forget where you come from. That's all [Daniella, living in an Arab village].*

## 11 References

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## **12 Appendices**

### **12.1 Appendix A - Interview Protocol**

#### **Family of origin, childhood relations (family and social) and upbringing**

What kind of relationships did you have at home- with parents, siblings, and peers? Was there anyone else in your family who married someone from a different background?

Looking back, was your family and social group supportive or hostile towards you while growing up?

#### **Life circumstances when, and motivations for, entering the relationships**

How did you and your partner meet one another? What made you decide to enter the relationship? Did you think about potential difficulties and obstacles your relationship might imply before entering the relationship?

Did the Arab-Israeli conflict influence you and/or your relationship? How did you handle any political tension? What language do you converse in with your partner?

#### **Questions relating to the period after entering the cross-frontier relationship**

What were your family and friends reactions towards your relationship? How did you celebrate the wedding? What were other's reactions towards the wedding?

How were your relationships within your family (parents, siblings, etc.) after entering the relationship? Did you and your partner discuss others attitudes towards your relationship? Did your social circle change because of the relationship? How often do you see your family?

#### **If the couple has children:**

How did you choose your baby's name? What language is spoken with your children? Was there any change in relationship with your family members since the birth of your child/children?

Would you support or oppose your child/children if they considered or entered a mixed relationship likewise?

#### **Significant Issues**

What and how do you celebrate the holidays? Are they joyous or stressful occasions? How do you handle any political crises, army, war, suicide bombings? Do you speak about the political situation?

#### **Relationship Dynamics**

What dreams did you have before you met your partner regarding family life and what dreams do you have now? Were your dreams fulfilled?

If you had a chance to go back into your past, would you enter the same relationship again? Generally, what is your view on Israeli Jewish & Arab couples? Would you advice or oppose your friends to enter a similar relationship? Do you know any other Israeli Jewish & Arab couples? If no then ... would you want to contact other similarly mixed couples?

Did you ever feel that if you married/entered a relationship with someone of the same background it might have been less stressful?

Many people talk about the challenges of mixed relationships... can you discuss any that you may have experienced? If yes then ... How do you handle the challenges?

What parts of your relationship make you happy? What relationship aspects make you sad?

What are some differences between you and your partner that you feel you need to discuss? In what ways do you feel closer to your partner now than when you first met? Do you feel that you need any improvement in your relationship? How often do you have discussions longer than 15 minutes with your partner?

Have you learned anything from your relationship? Anything you gained or lost? Do you think your relationship is a unique one?

How much attention do you pay to other people's reactions and behaviour towards your relationship? What advice would you give other couples considering or in similar relationships in order to make their relationship succeed?

## 12.2 Appendix B – Consent Form

- סודי אישי

- The University College London  
Department of Behavioural and Social Sciences in Medicine

### מחקר בנושא: השפעת היחסים בין זוגות מעורבים בישראל

שם המרואיין:	טלפון (בית):	טלפון (נייד):
תאריך:	שעת הראיון:	

1. ד. א.

במסגרת עבודת הדוקטורט שלי באוניברסיטה - קולג' - לונדון שבאנגליה, אני שמטרתו לבחון את השפעת מערכת היחסים בין זוגות מעורבים (ערבים וישראלים) על חייכם כאנשים פרטיים ועל השתלבותכם בחברה הישראלית. המידע שתספקו הכרחי לשם הבנת המורכבות הייחודית של היחסים בין ערבים ויהודים בישראל על רקע הקונפליקט המתמיד בין העמים. כמו כן המחקר יעסוק גם בדרכי התמודדותכם עם הקשיים האפשריים שמעלה מערכת יחסים זוגית כזו, גם בחיי היום – יום

אני מודה לך שהסכמת להתראיין. העזרה שלך למחקר הזה מאוד משמעותית עבורי לשם איסוף מידע; המידע שתמסור/תמסרי לנו יעזור לי להבין טוב יותר את חוויתך. אני משוכנעת שהמידע שייאגר וינותח על ידי, במסגרת עבודת הדוקטורט, יאפשר גם לקדם את המחקר העתידי בנושא חשוב זה, ובנוסף יצור הבנה מעמיקה יותר בקרב אנשים המבקשים להכנס למערכת יחסים כזו.

כל מידע אישי או אחר שיימסר על ידיך היום הוא סודי בהחלט. המידע ישמש אותי ורק אותי במסגרת המחקר הנ"ל ולא אף אחד אחר. כאשר יפורסמו הממצאים, לא יוזכר שמך בשום מקרה, ואופן הכתיבה יהיה כללי.

אני, \_\_\_\_\_, מסכים להשתתף במחקר הנ"ל, לאור האמור לעיל.

חתימה

- סודי אישי -

*12.2.1 English Translation of the Consent Form*

**Consent Form**  
**The University College London**  
**Department of Behavioural and Social Sciences in Medicine**

**Research Topic: Mixed Relationships in Israel**

Interviewee's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Home telephone no.: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile phone no.: \_\_\_\_\_  
Time of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Sir / Madam,

Within my Doctorate work at the University College London in England, I am conducting a research that examines the influence of being involved in mixed Israeli Jewish & Arab relationships on your lives as individuals and as members of Israeli society. The information you will provide is imperative to the understanding of these relationships in light of the tension existing between Arabs and Jews in Israel. The study will also look at the coping processes you employ in your daily life in general and when encountering possible difficulties.

I thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Your help in the research is highly significant for the study's data gathering; it will help me understand what you experience. I am convinced the information I accumulate and analyse will be invaluable for future research as well as provide insight for others who are contemplating entering such relationships.

All personal or other information that you will share today will remain absolutely confidential. The information will be used only by me and only in the framework of this research. When my findings are published, you will remain anonymous and the writing process will be general.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in this research, in the light of the above written information

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

-Confidential-

## Appendix C - Demographic Questionnaire Hebrew version

### שאלון רקע

1. שנת לידה: \_\_\_\_\_
2. שנת לידה של בן/בת הזוג \_\_\_\_\_
3. השכלה: \_\_\_\_\_
1. יסודי 2. תיכון 3. מקצועית גבוהה 4. אקדמאית 5. אקדמאית גבוהה (תואר שני ומעלה) 6. אחר \_\_\_\_\_
4. מה היתה רמת השכר של הורייך?
  1. שכר מינימום 2. שכר מינימום – שכר ממוצע במשק 3. שכר ממוצע במשק.
  4. גבוהה מהשכר הממוצע במשק
  5. מהו המקצוע של ההורים?
- אב: 1. מקצוע חופשי (עורך דין רופא וכיוצ"ב) 2. מנהלתי (שירות ציבורי, עבודת משרד מזכירות וכיוצ"ב) 3. טכני (שירותים) 4. יצרני (תעשייה) 5. עסקים 6. משאבי אנוש 7. לא עובד (עקרת בית, מובטל). 8. אחר \_\_\_\_\_.
- אם: 1. מקצוע חופשי (עורך דין רופא וכיוצ"ב) 2. מנהלתי (שירות ציבורי, עבודת משרד מזכירות וכיוצ"ב) 3. טכני (שירותים) 4. יצרני (תעשייה) 5. עסקים 6. משאבי אנוש 7. לא עובד (עקרת בית, מובטל). 8. אחר \_\_\_\_\_.
6. מהו מספר האחים והאחיות? \_\_\_\_\_
7. בית הורייך היה?
  1. דתי 2. מסורתי 3. לא דתי.
8. אני משתכר כיום?
  1. שכר מינימום 2. שכר מינימום – שכר ממוצע במשק ( כ- 6,800 ₪) 3. שכר ממוצע במשק. 4. גבוהה מהשכר הממוצע במשק 5. פי שתיים ויותר מהשכר הממוצע במשק.



9. מהו המקצוע שלך ושל בן/בת זוגתך היום?

שלי: 1. מקצוע חופשי (עורך דין רופא וכיוצ"ב) 2. מנהלתי (שירות ציבורי, עבודת משרד וכיוצ"ב) 3. טכני (שירותים) 4. יצרני (תעשייה) 5. עסקים 6. משאבי אנוש 7. לא עובד (עקרת בית, מובטל). 8. אחר \_\_\_\_\_.

בן/בת הזוג: 1. מקצוע חופשי (עורך דין רופא וכיוצ"ב) 2. מנהלתי (שירות ציבורי, עבודת משרד וכיוצ"ב) 3. טכני (שירותים) 4. יצרני (תעשייה) 5. עסקים 6. משאבי אנוש 7. לא עובד (עקרת בית, מובטל). 8. אחר \_\_\_\_\_.

10. באיזה שנה הכרתם? \_\_\_\_\_
11. כמה זמן אתם בני זוג? \_\_\_\_\_
12. כמה ילדים יש לכם? \_\_\_\_\_
13. כיצדהיית מגדירה את המצב הכלכלי שלך כיום, בהשוואה למצבך הכלכלי לפני שהכרתם? \_\_\_\_\_

1. גרוע יותר 2. אותו דבר 3. השתפר.

15. האם החלפתם בעבר מקום מגורים, אם כן היכן גרתם וכמה פעמים עברתם דירה? \_\_\_\_\_

16. האם נפרדתם בעבר? \_\_\_\_\_

1. כן 2. לא

17. אם התשובה לשאלה 15 היא חיובית, לכמה זמן נפרדתם, האם בזמן הפרידה בן/בת הזוג היה בקשר עם מישהו אחר? \_\_\_\_\_?

18. האם אתה/את סובלים באופן קבוע ממחלות כרוניות או ממחלות אחרות, ואם כן האם המחלות הנ"ל מפריעות לך לתפקוד היום יומי?

1. כן 2. לא

19. האם אתה נוטל תרופות על בסיס יומי?

1. כן 2. לא

20. מה היה הגורם החשוב ביותר שהביא אותך למערכת היחסים? (יכול להיות יותר מאחד).

1.אהבה 2.ההרפתקה 3.משיכה גופנית 4.הצורך להיות אחר ושונה 5.הנוחות

6.השפעה של ההורים/מרדנות 7.כסף 8.מעמד חברתי 9.התאמה של בן הזוג.

10.אידיאולוגיה 11.אחר \_\_\_\_\_.

### 12.2.2 English Translation of Background Questionnaire

Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Birth year of your partner \_\_\_\_\_

Education:

1. elementary school 2. high school 3. higher professional 4. academic
5. second degree and higher 6. \_\_\_\_\_

What was the earning income level of your parents?

1. minimum salary 2. minimum to average salary in the market
3. average market salary 4. higher than the average salary

What was your parents' profession?

Father:

1. professional independent (solicitor, doctor, etc.) 2. administrative (public service, office work, secretarial, etc.) 3. technical services
4. production/industry 5. business/commerce 6. human resources
7. unemployed/housewife 8. Other \_\_\_\_\_

Mother

1. professional independent (solicitor, doctor, etc.) 2. administrative (public service, office work, secretarial, etc.) 3. technical services
4. production/industry 5. business/commerce 6. human resources
7. unemployed/housewife 8. Other \_\_\_\_\_

How many brothers and sisters do you have?

\_\_\_\_\_

Your parent's house was:

1. religious 2. traditional 3. not religious

What is your present day income:

1. minimum salary 2. minimum to average salary in the market
3. average market salary 4. higher than the average salary

Yours and your partner's present day profession?

Your's:

1. professional independent (solicitor, doctor, etc.) 2. administrative (public service, office work, secretarial, etc.) 3. technical services
4. production/industry 5. business/commerce 6. human resources
7. unemployed/housewife 8. Other \_\_\_\_\_

Partners':

1. professional independent (solicitor, doctor, etc.)
2. administrative (public service, office work, secretarial, etc.)
3. technical services
4. production/industry
5. business/commerce
6. human resources
7. unemployed/housewife
8. Other \_\_\_\_\_

What year did you meet? \_\_\_\_\_

For how long are you a couple? \_\_\_\_\_

How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

How would you define your economical situation now relative to the one when you met?

1. worse
2. the same
3. improved

Did you move in the past? If so, where did you live and how many times did you move?

\_\_\_\_\_

Did you ever separate in the past?

- 1, yes
2. no

If the answer to question 16 was positive, for how long did you separate and if you, in this separation period, were involved in another relationship?

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you suffer from chronic illnesses or others? And, if so, does the illness disturb you in daily functioning?

1. yes
2. no

Do you take medication daily?

1. yes
2. no

What was your main motivation for entering your mixed relationship with your partner (you can choose more than one):

1. love
2. adventure
3. physical attraction
4. the need to be different and unique
5. convenience
6. parental influence/revolt
7. money
8. social status
9. partner compatibility
10. ideology
11. other \_\_\_\_\_

## 12.3 Appendix D – I-MQS Hebrew Version

### שאלון קשר זוגי \* I-MQS

לפניך משפטים בהם אנשים משתמשים לעתים כדי לתאר את מערכת היחסים הזוגית שלהם. לכל משפט קיימות שבע אפשרויות תשובה, כאשר 1 ו-7 מסמנות את התשובות הקיצוניות ביותר. לגבי כל משפט אנא סמני את המספר המבטא טוב ביותר את הרגשתך או דעתך, בין 1 ל-7.

השאלון אינו מבחן, לכן אין בו תשובות נכונות או בלתי נכונות. אנא הקפדי לענות על כל הפריטים בשאלון.

1. עד כמה את/ה מקבלת את תכונות האיפי וההתנהגות של בן/בת זוגך?

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

מאד לא מרוצה

מאד מרוצה

ממרבית התכונות

ממרבית התכונות

2. עד כמה את/ה ובן/בת זוגך יכולים לשוחח ביניכם על רגשותיכם וחוויותיכם?

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

משתפים זה את זה

לא מדברים בינינו

בכל דבר

על רגשות וחוויות

3. כאשר יש בעיות או כשצריך לקבל החלטות --

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

אנו לא מצליחים לגשר

אנו תמיד מגיעים

על חילוקי הדעות

להחלטה משותפת

4. באיזו מידה יש ביניכם הסכמה על הרצאות כספיות וניהול העניינים הכלכליים של המשפחה?

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

קיימת הסכמה

אין הסכמה;

מלאה

חילוקי דעות מרובים

5. באיזו מידה אתם נהנים מסוגי פעילויות או בילויים דומים?

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

אנו נהנים מאותן

לכל אחד מאיתנו

פעילויות ובילויים

פעילויות ובילויים שונים

6. באיזו מידה קיימת ביניכם התאמה מינית?

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

אין בינינו

התאמה מינית

התאמה מינית

מלאה

7. באיזו מידה יש לכם השקפות דומות ביחס לטיפול בילדים ולחינוכם?

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

יש לנו השקפות

יש השקפות דומות

שונות מאד

ביחס לטיפול וחינוך הילדים

8. באיזו מידה יש ביניכם הסכמה על מידת הקשר עם משפחותיכם (הורים, אחים, וכו') ועל צורת הקשר עמם?

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

אין הסכמה;

קיימת הסכמה

חילוקי דיעות מרובים

מלאה

9. עד כמה את/ה שבע רצון מחלוקת התפקידים ביניכם ומה כל אחד צריך לעשות?

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

מאד שבע/ת רצון

מאד לא

שבע/ת רצון

10. באיזו מידה אתם יכולים לסמוך אחד על השני ולתת אמון זה בזה?

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

יכולים לסמוך

לא סומכים

אחד על השני

אחד על השני;

ויש אמון מלא

אין אמון

\* מקור: פרופ' יואב לביא, הפקולטה ללימודי רווחה ובריאות, ביה"ס לעבודה סוציאלית, אוניברסיטת חיפה

**Marital Quality Scale – I-MQS ©**

The following are sentences people use to describe their relationships. Every sentence has seven possible answers. 1 and 7 represent the most extreme ones. For every sentence please circle the number that best represents your feeling or opinion, between 1 and 7. **This is not a test, and therefore there are no correct or incorrect answers. Please try to answer each item.**

**1. To what extent do you accept your partner's personality characteristics and behaviour?**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Very  
satisfied with  
most of the  
characteristics

Very  
dissatisfied  
with most of  
the  
characteristics

**2. To what extent can you and your partner share your feelings and experiences with each other?**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

We  
don't share  
feelings and  
experiences  
with each other

We  
share  
everything  
with one  
another

**3. When there are problems or when decisions must be made...**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

We  
always reach a  
joint decision

We  
don't succeed  
settling our  
differences

**4. To what extent do you agree about spending the family's money and managing its finances?**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

There  
are many  
disagreements

There  
is complete  
agreement

**5. To what extent do you and your partner enjoy similar social and leisure activities?**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Each  
one of us enjoys  
different  
activities

We  
enjoy the same  
activities

**6. To what extent is there sexual compatibility between you and your partner?**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Complete sexual compatibility			There is no sexual compatibility			

**7. To what extent are your views on childcare and child rearing similar?**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
We hold very different views			We hold similar views			

**8. To what extent do you agree on the degree of contact and relationships with your extended families (parents, siblings, etc.)**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
There are many disagreements			There is complete agreement			

**9. To what extent are you satisfied with the division of duties between you and with what each of you must do?**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very satisfied			Very dissatisfied			

**10. To what extent can you count on and trust each other?**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
We can count on each other and there is complete trust			We don't count on each other and there is no trust			

## 12.4 Appendix E - Brief Symptom Inventory – Hebrew Version

להלן רשימה של בעיות ותלונות שיש לפעמים לאנשים. קרא כל פריט בעיון וסמן את המספר בין 0-4 המתאר הכי טוב באיזו מידה סבלת מבעיה זו בחדש האחרון כולל היום. אנא אל תדלג על אף פריט.

0- בכלל לא

1- במקצת

2- במידה בינונית

3- במידה די רבה

4- מאוד

0 1 2 3 4		עד כמה סבלת מ:
0 1 2 3 4	עצבנות	1.
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשת עלפון או סחחורת	2.
0 1 2 3 4	מחשבה שמישהו אחר יכול לשלוט על מחשבותיך	3.
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשה שאחרים אשמים בבעיות שלך	4.
0 1 2 3 4	קשיים בזיכרון	5.
0 1 2 3 4	מתרגז ומתעצבן מהר	6.
0 1 2 3 4	כאבים בלב או בחזה	7.
0 1 2 3 4	פחד ממקומות פתוחים	8.
0 1 2 3 4	מחשבות לשים קץ לחיך	9.
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשה שאי אפשר לסמוך על מרבית האנשים	10.
0 1 2 3 4	חוסר תאבון	11.
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשת פחד פתאומי ללא סיבה	12.
0 1 2 3 4	התפרצויות זעם שלא יכולת לשלוט בהן	13.
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשת בדידות גם כשהנך בחברת אנשים	14.
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשה שמישהו מפריע לך לבצע דברים	15.



0 1 2 3 4	הרגשת בידדות	.16
0 1 2 3 4	מצוברח	.17
0 1 2 3 4	חוסר עניין בדברים	.18
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשת פחד	.19
0 1 2 3 4	הנך נפגע בקלות	.20
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשה שאנשים אינם ידידותיים או שאינם מסמפתים אותך	.21
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשה שהנך נחות מאחרים	.22
0 1 2 3 4	בחילה או אי שקט בבטן	.23
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשה שאנשים מסתכלים או מדברים עליך	.24
0 1 2 3 4	קושי להירדם	.25
0 1 2 3 4	צורך לחזור ולבדוק מה שעשית	.26
0 1 2 3 4	קושי בהחלטה	.27
0 1 2 3 4	פחד לנסוע באוטובוס או ברכבת	.28
0 1 2 3 4	קושי בנשימה	.29
0 1 2 3 4	גלי חום או קור	.30
0 1 2 3 4	צורך להימנע ממקומות או מפעולות אשר מפחידים אותך	.31
0 1 2 3 4	שהראש נעשה ריק	.32
0 1 2 3 4	שהגפיים כאילו מאובנות או דקירות בחלקים שונים של הגוף	.33
0 1 2 3 4	מחשבות שמגיע לך עונש על חטאך	.34
0 1 2 3 4	חוסר תקווה לגבי העתיד	.35
0 1 2 3 4	קשיי ריכוז	.36
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשת חולשה בחלקים מגופך	.37

0 1 2 3 4	הרגשת מתח	.38
0 1 2 3 4	מחשבות על מוות	.39
0 1 2 3 4	דחף להכות, לפצוע או להזיק למישהו	.40
0 1 2 3 4	דחף לשבור ולהפוך דברים	.41
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשת מבוכה בחברה	.42
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשת אי נוחות פנימית	.43
0 1 2 3 4	חוסר הרגשת קרבה לאנשים	.44
0 1 2 3 4	התקפי פחד או פאניקה	.45
0 1 2 3 4	נכנס לויכוחים מהירים	.46
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשת עצבנות כשהנך נשאר לבד	.47
0 1 2 3 4	שהאחרים אינם מעריכים כראוי את הישגיך	.48
0 1 2 3 4	חוסר שקט כזה שאינך יכול לשבת במקום אחד	.49
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשת חוסר ערך	.50
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשה שאנשים ינצלו אותך (אם תתן להם)	.51
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשות אשמה	.52
0 1 2 3 4	הרגשה שמישהו לא בסדר עם הראש שלך	.53

### 12.4.1 Brief Symptom Inventory – English Version

To follow is a list of problems and complaints that people sometimes have. Read each item carefully and mark the number which describes the extent to which you suffered from this problem in the last month including today. Please don't leave out any item.

To what extent have you suffered from:

	Not at all	A little	An average amount	Quite a bit	A lot
1. Nervousness or shakiness inside.	0	1	2	3	4
2. Faintness or dizziness.	0	1	2	3	4
3. The idea that someone else can control your thought.	0	1	2	3	4
4. Feeling that others are to blame for most of your troubles.	0	1	2	3	4
5. Trouble remembering things.	0	1	2	3	4
6. Feeling easily annoyed or irritated.	0	1	2	3	4
7. Pains in heart or chest.	0	1	2	3	4
8. Feeling afraid in open spaces.	0	1	2	3	4
9. Thoughts of ending your life.	0	1	2	3	4
10. Feeling that most people cannot be trusted.	0	1	2	3	4
11. Poor appetite.	0	1	2	3	4
12. Suddenly scared for no reason.	0	1	2	3	4
13. Temper outburst that you could not control.	0	1	2	3	4
14. Feeling lonely even when you are with people.	0	1	2	3	4
15. Feeling blocked in getting things done.	0	1	2	3	4
16. Feeling lonely.	0	1	2	3	4

17. Feeling blue.	0	1	2	3	4
18. Feeling no interest in things.	0	1	2	3	4
19. Feeling fearful.	0	1	2	3	4
20. Your feelings being easily hurt.	0	1	2	3	4
21. Feeling that people are unfriendly or dislike you.	0	1	2	3	4
22. Feeling inferior to others.	0	1	2	3	4
23. Nausea or upset stomach.	0	1	2	3	4
24. Feeling that you are watched or talked about by others.	0	1	2	3	4
25. Trouble falling asleep.	0	1	2	3	4
26. Having to check and double-check what you do.	0	1	2	3	4
27. Difficulty making decisions.	0	1	2	3	4
28. Feeling afraid to travel on subways, buses or trains.	0	1	2	3	4
29. Trouble getting your breath.	0	1	2	3	4
30. Hot or cold spells.	0	1	2	3	4
31. Having to avoid certain things, places or activities because they frighten you.	0	1	2	3	4
32. Your mind going blank.	0	1	2	3	4
33. Numbness or tingling in parts of your body.	0	1	2	3	4
34. The idea that you should be punished for your sins.	0	1	2	3	4
35. Feeling hopeless about the future.	0	1	2	3	4
36. Trouble concentrating.	0	1	2	3	4
37. Feeling weak in parts of your body.	0	1	2	3	4

38. Feeling tense or keyed up.	0	1	2	3	4
39. Thoughts of death or dying.	0	1	2	3	4
40. Having urges to beat, injure or harm someone.	0	1	2	3	4
41. Having urges to break or smash things.	0	1	2	3	4
42. Feeling very self-conscious with others.	0	1	2	3	4
43. Feeling uneasy in crowds.	0	1	2	3	4
44. Never feeling close to another person.	0	1	2	3	4
45. Spells of terror or panic.	0	1	2	3	4
46. Getting into frequent arguments.	0	1	2	3	4
47. Feeling nervous when you are alone.	0	1	2	3	4
48. Others not giving you proper credit for your achievements.	0	1	2	3	4
49. Feeling so restless that you couldn't sit still.	0	1	2	3	4
50. Feelings of worthlessness	0	1	2	3	4
51. Feeling that people will take advantage of you if you let them.	0	1	2	3	4
52. Feelings of guilt.	0	1	2	3	4
53. The idea that something is wrong with your mind.	0	1	2	3	4